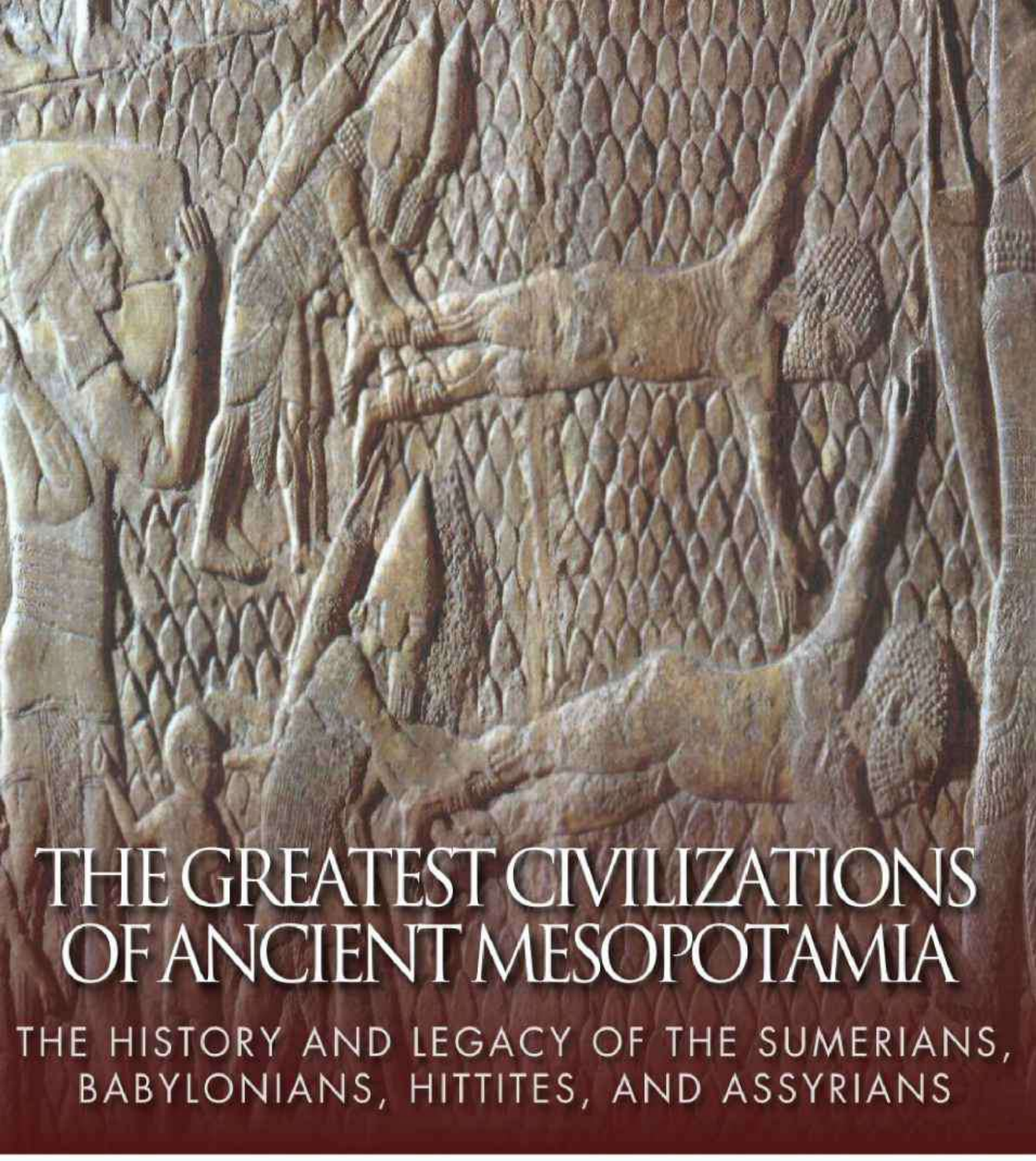
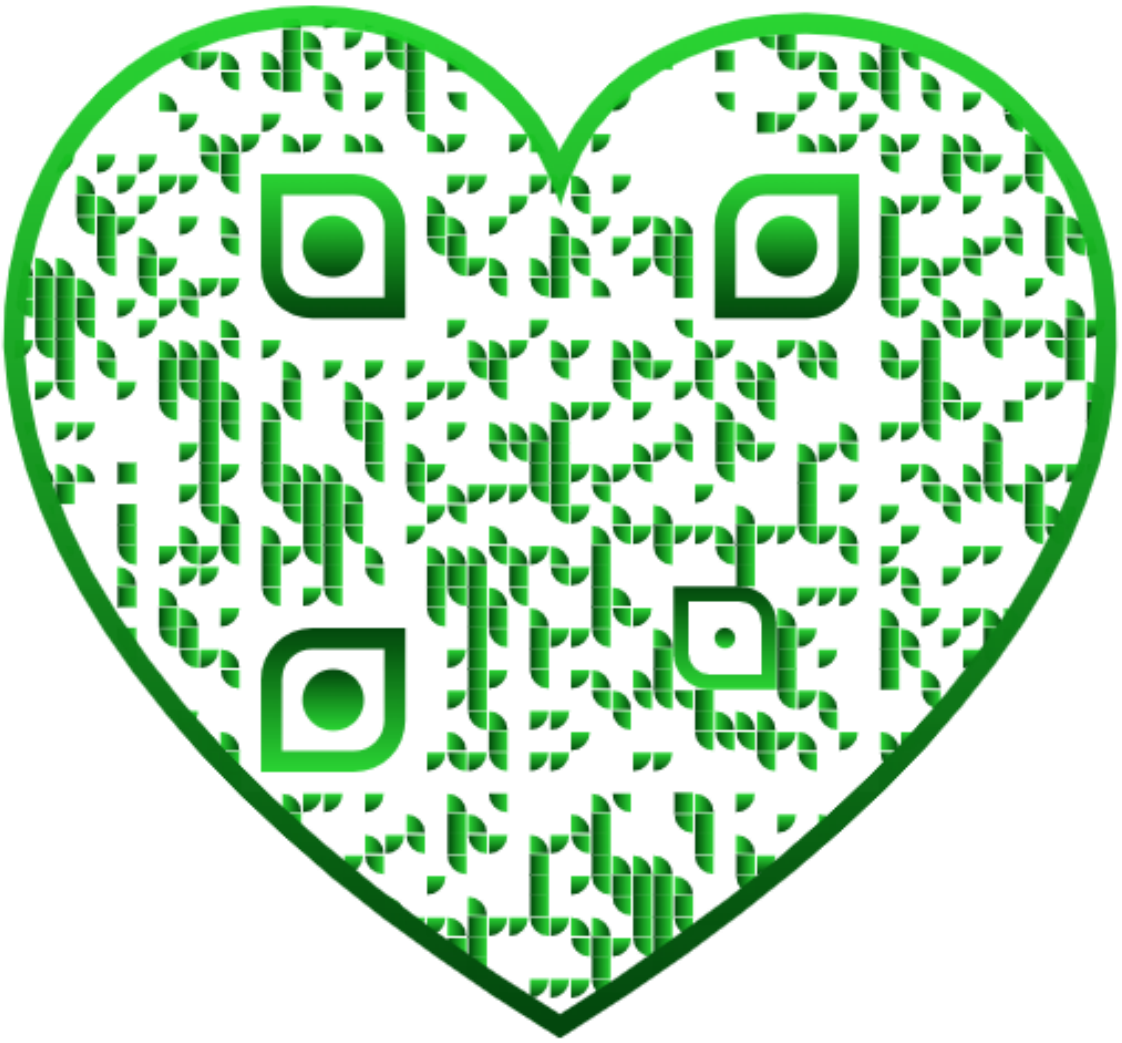


THE GREATEST CIVILIZATIONS OF ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

THE HISTORY AND LEGACY OF THE SUMERIANS, BABYLONIANS, HITTITES, AND ASSYRIANS

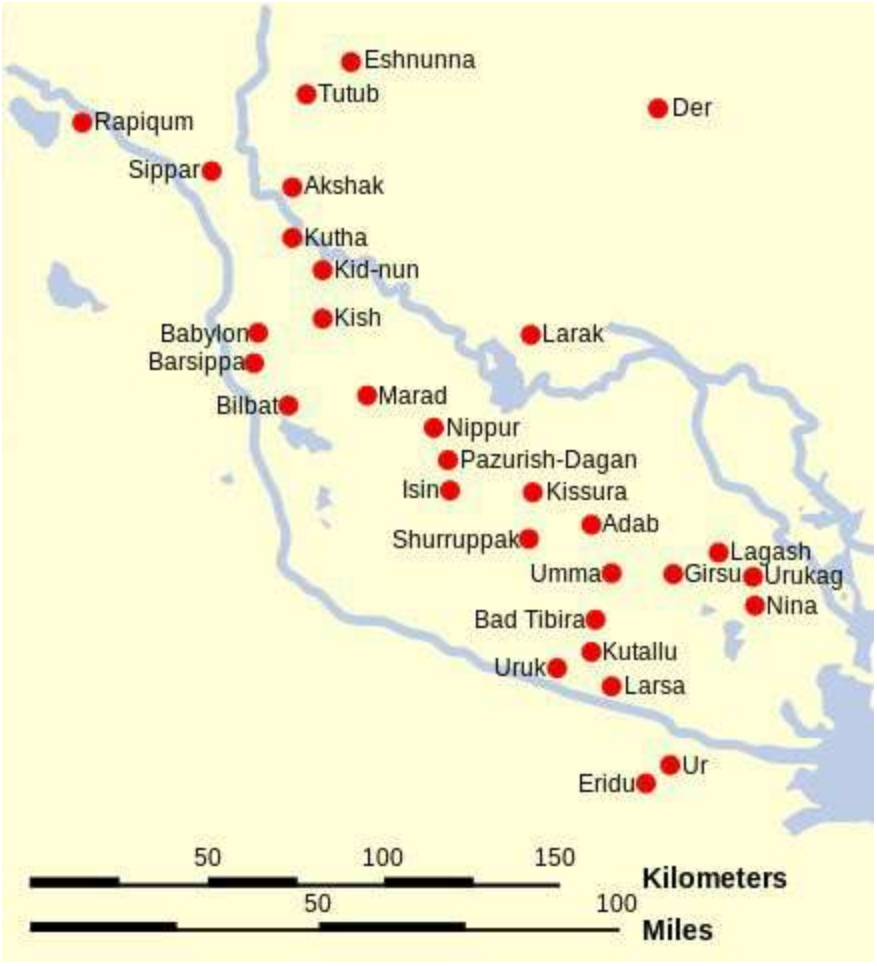
by

CHARLES RIVER EDITORS



The Greatest Civilizations of Ancient Mesopotamia: The History and Legacy of the Sumerians, Babylonians, Hittites, and Assyrians

By Charles River Editors



A map of Sumer

Introduction

Gudea of Lagash

The Sumerians

When American archaeologists discovered a collection of cuneiform tablets in Iraq in the late 19th century, they were confronted with a language and a people who were at the time only scarcely known to even the most knowledgeable scholars of ancient Mesopotamia: the Sumerians. The exploits and achievements of other Mesopotamian peoples, such as the Assyrians and Babylonians, were already known to a large segment of the population through the Old Testament and the nascent field of Near Eastern studies had unraveled the enigma of the Akkadian language that was widely used throughout the region in ancient times, but the discovery of the Sumerian tablets brought to light the existence of the Sumerian culture, which was the

oldest of all the Mesopotamian cultures.

Although the Sumerians continue to get second or even third billing compared to the Babylonians and Assyrians, perhaps because they never built an empire as great as the Assyrians or established a city as enduring and great as Babylon, they were the people who provided the template of civilization that all later Mesopotamians built upon. The Sumerians are credited with being the first people to invent writing, libraries, cities, and schools in Mesopotamia (Ziskind 1972, 34), and many would argue that they were the first people to create and do those things anywhere in world.

For a people so great it is unfortunate that their accomplishments and contributions, not only to Mesopotamian civilization but to civilization in general, largely go unnoticed by the majority of the public. Perhaps the Sumerians were victims of their own success; they gradually entered the historical record, established a fine civilization, and then slowly submerged into the cultural patchwork of their surroundings. They also never suffered a great and sudden collapse like other peoples of the ancient Near East, such as the Hittites, Assyrians and Neo-Babylonians did. A close examination of Sumerian culture and chronology reveals that the Sumerians set the cultural tone in Mesopotamia for several centuries in the realms of politics/governments, arts, literature, and religion. The Sumerians were truly a great people whose legacy continued long after they were gone.

Babylon

Picture of Babylon’s ruins taken in 1932.

The ancient world was full of many fantastic cities and places, and like today’s major cities, the great ancient cities were hubs of trade, religion, and science. Writing was first invented in ancient cities, and many important scientific discoveries were also made in them, some of which are still used in the modern world. Among the many cities of the ancient world, Rome and Athens may come to mind first, but the city of Babylon in the land of Mesopotamia was already an ancient, venerated city when the others were still inconsequential settlements.

Today, Babylon has become a byword for greed, excess, and licentiousness, mostly due to its mention in the Bible, but a closer examination reveals that Babylon was so much more, and even perhaps the most important city in the ancient world. Ancient Babylon was home to great dynasties that produced some of the world’s most influential leaders, most notably Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar, and these rulers invoked their wills on the entire ancient

Near East and have been remembered as both progressive and cruel all at the same time. Babylon was also the seat of culture in ancient Mesopotamia and the place where scholars made amazing scientific advances that would not be eclipsed for several centuries. An examination of ancient Babylon demonstrates that it was truly the first great city in the ancient world.

Of course, the sheer span of history between Babylon's power and today has produced plenty of historical questions and controversy. One of the things people most closely associate Babylon with is the Hanging Gardens, which, like the Great Pyramid of Giza, were considered both a technological marvel and an aesthetic masterpiece. Ancient historians believed that the Hanging Gardens were constructed around the 7th century B.C. after the second rise of Babylon, which would make them the second-oldest of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, and they were reputedly created by the biblical Nebuchadnezzar II (the king who conquered Judea) to please his homesick wife, after the model of Egyptian pleasure gardens. However, in 1993, British Assyriologist, Stephanie Dalley, proposed a theory that the Hanging Gardens were ordered built by the Assyrian King Sennacherib a century earlier for his giant palace at Nineveh instead. She believed that the two sites were easily confused by ancient sources, resulting in the Gardens being incorrectly located in Babylon a century later.

Babylon was also instrumental in the development of the region's religions. Ancient Mesopotamian religion continues to captivate people for many of the same reasons today's best known religions and their histories fascinate people. The religion practiced by the Ancient Mesopotamians provides a certain mix between the mundane and the surreal, and at the same time aspects of it are both familiar and bizarre to people today. Some find themselves drawn to it based on its preeminent position in religious history as the oldest documented religion in the world. Others become fascinated with the close connections between some of the Mesopotamian religious texts, which include a flood story, a creation story and a story of the righteous sufferer, and their parallels in the Hebrew Bible. Today the Ancient Mesopotamians and their religion are a source of curiosity, but thousands of years ago the religion was an integral part of their lives. From their birth to their death, deities surrounded them, and whether their social interactions were on the level of a smaller city or that of a larger nation-state, deities

played key roles in the social fabric of their society. In fact, the people and religion were so intertwined that a study of Ancient Mesopotamian religion is a study of Ancient Mesopotamian culture.

The Hittites

"Whoever after me becomes king resettles Hattusas, let the Stormgod of the Sky strike him!" – A Hittite inscription found at the capital city of Hattusa

The pages of world history textbooks contain a litany of "lost" empires and civilizations, but usually, upon further review, it is revealed that these so called lost empires are often just lesser known cultures that had a less apparent impact on history than other more well-known civilizations. When one scours the pages of history for a civilization that was inexplicably lost, but had a great impact during its time, very few candidates can be found, but the Hittites are a notable example.

In fact, the Hittites are an ancient people who remain somewhat enigmatic, and perhaps little known to most people, but their influence on the ancient Near East is undeniable. From high on their capital of Hattusa in central

Anatolia, the Hittites were able to conquer and control a kingdom that roughly comprised the area of the modern nation-states of Turkey, Syria, and parts of Iraq and Lebanon through a combination of brute military force and shrewd diplomatic machinations.

Compared to some of their contemporaries – including the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians – the Hittites were somewhat distant both culturally and geographically. The Hittites were an Indo-European speaking in an ocean of Afro-Asiatic and Semitic groups, their homeland was to the north of Mesopotamia, and it contained no major river like the Nile, Tigris, or Euphrates Rivers. The Hittite empire was also far less enduring than its neighbors, as it only existed from about 1800-1200 BCE (van de Mieroop 2007, 156), which was considerably shorter than most of the other major kingdoms of the Near East.

With that said, the influence of the Hittites on the politics, economy, and overall situation of the ancient Near East cannot be understated; the Hittites were a force to be reckoned with while they existed. The sources used to reconstruct Hittite history and chronology are many and varied, and since the Hittites were a literate people who developed a fairly sophisticated corpus of literature, ancient Hittite archives can be used to reconstruct events. Unfortunately, the Hittites were not keen about dating their sources, so most of the dates are dependent on ancient Egyptian sources (Macqueen 2003, 8). The Egyptian sources also provide excellent details on events that either the Hittites refused to mention in their own texts, have not been discovered yet, or have been lost to the ages. Of course, modern archaeology has also helped to fill in the knowledge about Hittite civilization, especially in regards to palace and religious life in the ancient capital of Hattusa. Based on all of these sources, as well as studies by eminent modern scholars in the field, it’s possible to examine who the Hittites were, their influence on the ancient Near East, and the eventual collapse of their empire.

The Assyrians

Ancient depiction of an Assyrian

“I fought daily, without interruption against Taharqa, King of Egypt and Ethiopia, the one accursed by all the great gods. Five times I hit him with the point of my arrows inflicting wounds from which he should not recover, and then I laid siege to Memphis his royal residence, and conquered it in half a day by means of mines, breaches and assault ladders.” - Esarhaddon

“I captured 46 towns...by consolidating ramps to bring up battering rams, by infantry attacks, mines, breaches and siege engines.” - Sennacherib

When scholars study the history of the ancient Near East, several wars that had extremely brutal consequences (at least by modern standards) often stand out. Forced removal of entire populations, sieges that decimated entire cities, and wanton destruction of property were all tactics used by the various peoples of the ancient Near East against each other, but the Assyrians were the first people to make war a science. When the Assyrians are mentioned, images of war and brutality are among the first that come to mind, despite the fact that their culture prospered for nearly 2,000 years.

Like a number of ancient individuals and empires in that region, the negative perception of ancient Assyrian culture was passed down through Biblical accounts, and regardless of the accuracy of the Bible’s depiction of certain events, the Assyrians clearly played the role of adversary for the Israelites. Indeed, Assyria (Biblical Shinar) and the Assyrian people played an important role in many books of the Old Testament and are first mentioned in the book of Genesis: “And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech, and Akkad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Ashur and built Nineveh and the city Rehoboth and Kallah.” (Gen. 10:10-11).

Although the Biblical accounts of the Assyrians are among the most interesting and are often corroborated with other historical sources, the Assyrians were much more than just the enemies of the Israelites and brutal thugs. A historical survey of ancient Assyrian culture reveals that although they were the supreme warriors of their time, they were also excellent merchants, diplomats, and highly literate people who recorded their history and religious rituals and ideology in great detail. The Assyrians, like their other neighbors in Mesopotamia, were literate and developed their own dialect of the Akkadian language that they used to write tens of thousands of documents in the cuneiform script (Kuhrt 2010, 1:84). Furthermore, the Assyrians prospered for so long that their culture is often broken down by historians into the “Old”, “Middle”, and “Neo” Assyrian periods, even though the Assyrians themselves viewed their history as a long succession of rulers from an archaic period until the collapse of the neo-Assyrian Empire in

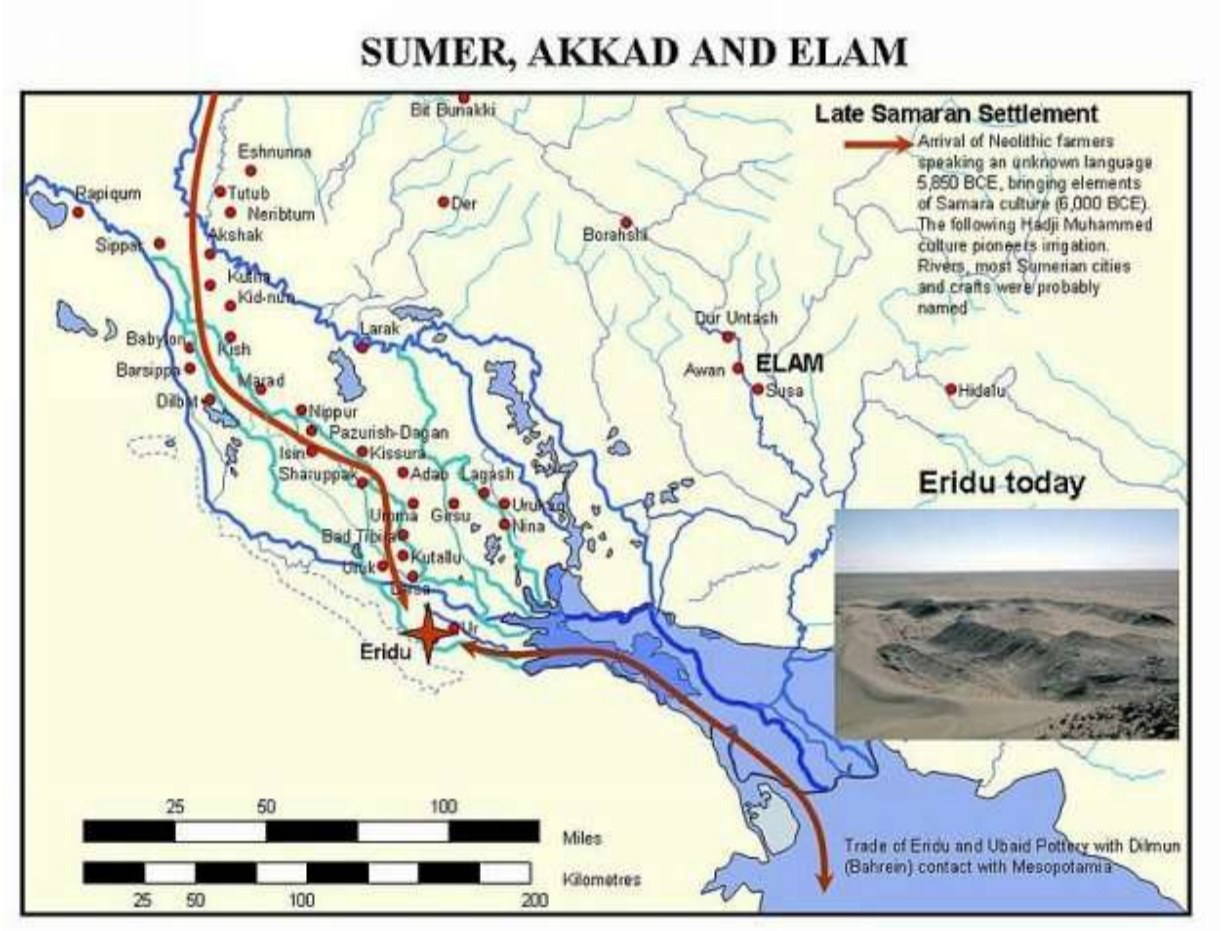
the 7th century BCE. In fact, the current divisions have been made by modern scholars based on linguistic changes, not on political dynasties (van de Mieroop 2007, 179).

The Greatest Civilizations of Ancient Mesopotamia: The History and Legacy of the Sumerians, Babylonians, Hittites, and Assyrians
About Charles River Editors
Introduction
The Sumerians
Chapter 1: The Origins of the Sumerians
Chapter 2: The Early Dynastic Period
Chapter 3: The Rise of the Akkadians
Chapter 4: The Third Dynasty of Ur
Chapter 5: Sumerian Culture
Chapter 6: Kingship and the Decline of the Sumerians
Online Resources
Bibliography
The Babylonians
Chapter 1: Mesopotamia before Babylon
Chapter 2: The First Babylonian Dynasty (circa 1894-1595 BC)
Chapter 3: Babylon in the Late Second Millennium
Chapter 4: Nebuchadnezzar II and the Neo-Babylonian Dynasty
Chapter 5: Nebuchadnezzar and the Hanging Gardens
Chapter 6: Babylon under the Achaemenid Persians
Chapter 7: The Final Decline of Babylon
Bibliography
The Hittites
Chapter 1: The Background of the Hittites
Chatter 2: The Hittite and Assyrian Trade Networks
Chapter 3: The Hittite Old Kingdom
Chapter 4: The Hittite New Kingdom
Chapter 5: Hittite Literature and Historiography
Chapter 6: Hittite Myth and Theology
Chapter 7: The Collapse of the Hittite Empire

Bibliography
The Assyrians
The Geographic Location of Ancient Assyria
Old Assyrian Culture
The Middle Assyrian Period (ca. 1400-1050)
The Neo-Assyrian Period (934-610 BC)
Neo-Assyrian Building Projects
Assyrian Warfare and Tactics
Assyrian Kingship and Religion
The Collapse of the Assyrian Empire
Bibliography

The Sumerians

Chapter 1: The Origins of the Sumerians



A map of the region during the early history of the Sumerians

Sumerian culture originated in what is known as the Fertile Crescent, particularly in southern Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Southern Mesopotamia, which is often referred to as Sumer, is known for its rich, alluvial soil but also its scarcity of other commodities such as timber and precious metals (Kuhrt 2010, 1:21). The soil and rivers provided ample food to sustain a large population, but the lack of other resources did not hamper the development of Sumerian culture, in fact, as will be discussed below, it may have instead provided an impetus for the Sumerians to expand beyond Mesopotamia. Much is known about the setting of Mesopotamia through archeological and geological analysis, but far less is known about the actual origins of the Sumerian people.

The peopling of Mesopotamia was a long process; in fact, by the time when

the first documents were written there – 3100 BCE or so – the region had already been inhabited for over 2,000 years (Kuhrt 2010, 1:19). However, where the Sumerian people may have originally lived is a source of scholarly debate. Some scholars believe that the Sumerians originated in India and may have been immigrants from the enigmatic Indus Valley civilization (von Soden 1994, 17), but there is little archeological or linguistic evidence and no historiographical evidence to support such a theory. Another migration theory places the source of the Sumerian people in the Caucus Mountains region. The Caucus region is also the source of the Indo-European peoples (Anthony 2007, 93) and some Uralic-Atalic speaking peoples.

Some linguists have identified similarities in the structure of Sumerian and some Uralic-Atalic languages, which may point to a distant relation (Ziskind 1972, 41). That said, tracing the origins of languages can be a difficult endeavor at any time and placing a definitive connection of a language to a people can sometimes be problematic: unless there is a way to know exactly when a group adopts a language then it is difficult to trace the group's origins. Most scholars who advocate some type of Sumerian migration, or invasion, hypothesis do so because the Sumerians were a non-Semitic speaking people who lived in the predominately Semitic speaking Mesopotamia.

Since there is no evidence that can definitively say where the Sumerians originated, some scholars advocate that the Sumerians were present in Mesopotamia from the earliest times (Kuhrt 2010, 1:23). Ultimately, until more evidence is discovered, it is impossible to say if the Sumerians migrated to Mesopotamia from elsewhere or if they had always inhabited the region (van de Mieroop 2007, 10). Although it may never be known where and if the Sumerians came from somewhere outside of Mesopotamia, by about 4000 BCE, they had planted the first seeds of civilization.

Early Mesopotamian culture is divided into different phases that are named for the cities that archaeologists have determined played a central role in development. The point in Mesopotamian history when the Sumerians can be definitely identified is the Ubaid phase, which lasted from around 4500 BCE until around 4000 BCE (van de Mieroop 2007, 14). The Ubaid phase was a significant departure from the earlier Neolithic phases in Mesopotamian

history as the Sumerians began to build cities and develop other features that are considered essential aspects of any civilization.

While the Ubaid phase was important in the development of Mesopotamian civilization, it was the Uruk phase that truly established the Sumerians as cultural torch bearers. The Uruk phase, which lasted from approximately 4000-2900 BCE, is distinguished from the Ubaid phase by its pottery (Kuhrt 2010, 1:22). Although the Ubaid and Uruk phases are considered two distinct archaeological periods, most scholars argue that the cultural differences between the two phases were minimal and that the absence of any non-Mesopotamian pottery militates against the inspiration for the Uruk culture coming from outside Sumer (Ziskind 1972, 38). When one considers an optimal location for a primary civilization Uruk, by most accounts, would not come to mind. Located just inland from the Persian Gulf marshes, Uruk was forced to rely on irrigation for its agricultural purposes as it was on neither the Euphrates or Tigris rivers (van de Mieroop 2007, 23). Although writing was first invented in Uruk, it came relatively late in the cultural phase, and because of that modern scholars are forced to make guesses as to the city's population during the period. Most assume that the agricultural output from the surrounding rural area was high enough to support a regional center and true city, which means that Uruk was the world's first true city (van de Mieroop 2007, 23).

A cylinder seal found at Uruk

Marcus Cyron's picture of part of the Inanna temple in Uruk

Aerial picture of excavated ruins at Uruk

Although Uruk was not the only city that the Sumerians built during the Uruk period, it was by far the greatest and also the source of most of the archeological and written evidence concerning early Sumerian culture (Kuhrt 2010, 1:23). Uruk went from being the world's first city to the most important political and cultural center in the ancient Near East in relatively quick fashion. Around 3200 BCE, the Sumerian Uruk culture began to expand beyond the borders of Sumer, which coincided with the emergence of writing (Kuhrt 2010, 1:23). The form of writing that the Sumerians developed became known by its Greek name, "cuneiform," for the wedge style characters that it employed (van de Mieroop 2007, 28). Writing, like many other inventions throughout world history, appears to have been created because of necessity as the Uruk culture grew the Sumerians needed to develop a sophisticated form of record keeping, which could only have been done through writing (van de Mieroop 2007, 28). Despite being used exclusively for the Sumerian language at first, the cuneiform writing system was later adapted and used by a number of different languages in the ancient Near East such as the following: Akkadian, Hittite, and Old Persian (Dalby

1986, 475).

Along with the emergence of writing, the Sumerians developed a sophisticated artistic style during the Uruk period that would influence later styles in the ancient Near East. Among the many pieces of art that have survived from the Uruk period, perhaps none capture the essence of the culture more than the "Uruk Vase." The Uruk Vase – whose location is currently unknown after it was stolen from the Baghdad Museum in 2003 but then returned four years later – is a large alabaster vase that depicts a scene of men bringing gifts to a deity on three separate registers (Frankfort 1996, 25-27). The Uruk Vase is the earliest representation of such a scene in Mesopotamian art and it influenced similar scenes that were often depicted on reliefs of royal palaces through the Neo-Assyrian period. Another artistic style that appears to have been first developed by the Sumerians during the Uruk period, which was replicated centuries later by the Assyrians, was the royal lion hunt motif (Kuhrt 2010: 1:23). On one particular stela, which was housed in the National Museum of Baghdad, a hunter dressed in possibly royal garb hunts lions with a bow (Frankfort 1996, 33). It may be that the lion hunt scene from Uruk is a commemoration of a marshland reclamation project (Frankfort 1996, 34), but the badly damaged relief is not accompanied with a text so it is not for certain if the scene was meant to depict an actual event or if it belonged in a religious or ritual context, which would mean that scene would have a more symbolic or metaphorical meaning. Whatever the purpose, it is hard to ignore a possible Sumerian influence on the numerous lion hunt scenes that Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (668-627 BCE) adorned his palace with nearly two and half thousand years later (Curtis and Reade 1995, 84-89).

A replica of the Vase

Perhaps even more impressive than the Mesopotamian artistic styles that the Sumerians established during the Uruk period was the monument building that they initiated. The emergence of ceremonial monument building in southern Mesopotamia is thought to be the impetus that sparked urban

development (Kuhrt 2010, 1:25). Temples were believed to be the house of the patron deity of a particular city so goods were often received and distributed at the temple complex (van de Mieroop 2007, 24). By the late Uruk period, temples were by far the largest buildings in any city and were constructed at great cost in material resources and labor (van de Mieroop 2007, 24). As the size and importance of temples grew in Sumer during the Uruk period, the building and architectural techniques also evolved.

The Sumerians developed the standard for Mesopotamian temple architecture during the Ubaid period and subsequent ethnic groups would follow that template through the Hellenistic period. One architectural technique that the Sumerians developed, which was used in all later periods in Mesopotamian history, was the buttresses and recessed walls (Frankfort 1996, 18). The evolution of the Mesopotamian temple complex then finally moved towards its final expression – the ziggurat. Beginning in the Uruk period the temple complex began to include a tower on a platform, known as a ziggurat (Frankfort 1996, 20). The "White Temple" at Uruk had an "archaic" ziggurat that rose about forty feet above the ground, which was enough to dominate the featureless countryside for miles around (Frankfort 1996, 20). To the Sumerians the ziggurat represented a mountain on top of which was the particular deity's abode who the temple was dedicated (Frankfort 1996, 21). In later more literate periods of Mesopotamian history the names of the ziggurats were recorded in writing, which indicates the theological importance of the structures. For instance, the ziggurat of the god Enlil was known as "House of the Mountain, Mountain of the Storm, and Bond Between Heaven and Earth" (Frankfort 1996, 22). The materials needed to build these great structures had to be imported from long distances to Uruk, which indicates that the early Sumerian city was not just an important cultural center, but also a political hub.

Today, scholars often refer to the late Uruk period as the "Uruk Expansion" because it was a period when the city of Uruk exercised immense influence not only throughout Mesopotamia, but also in neighboring regions of the ancient Near East. In fact, one may argue that the Sumerians of the late Uruk period created the world's first empire. The expansion of Uruk's influence was directly related to its need for resources not found in southern Mesopotamia, so the Sumerians monopolized trade networks that brought

such commodities as stone, timber, and lapis lazuli to Sumer. Although the Sumerians were literate by the late Uruk period, the records are still minimal in number and the best archaeological information of the expansion process actually comes from outlying regions – such as western Iran, northern Syria, and southern Turkey – that were influenced by Uruk (van de Mieroop 2007, 35).

Archeological evidence from Iran, Syria, and Turkey reveals that the Sumerian culture of the late Uruk period had spread to those regions in a manner that could be compared to other, later empires from Mesopotamia (Algaze 1989, 588). Periods of internal stability in Uruk were accompanied by an increase in resources, which then led to expansion in the communication lines and trade networks (Algaze 1989, 572). As incredible as the Uruk expansion was, it was also short lived and gave way to a common political pattern that was quite common in Mesopotamian history – competing city-states.

Chapter 2: The Early Dynastic Period

A fragment of the Stele of Vultures, created sometime around 2450 BCE

The Early Dynastic period, sometimes also known as the “Old Sumerian” or “pre-Sargonic” period (Kuhrt 2010, 1:27), was characterized by city-states that competed with each other, often violently, for control of southern Mesopotamia (van de Mieroop 2007, 41). Some of the major city-states that vied for control of southern Mesopotamia at this time were the following: Uruk, which although somewhat diminished continued to be important, Ur, Kish, Larsa, Lagash, Girsu, and Nippur. Although the Sumerians all believed in essentially the same pantheon, they also believed that each of their cities

was home to specific deities; for instance, Nanna was the patron god of Ur, while in Uruk it was Inanna (van de Mieroop 2007, 45). So therefore the conflicts between the various city-states of southern Mesopotamia were not driven by religion or ethnicity, but more the age old desire for power, which in a way also ironically united the conflicting cities. It was during the Early Dynastic period when the title, "King of Kish," began to be used by kings, even those from cities other than Kish. Masanepada, the king of Ur, was one such king who took the title "King of Kish", which probably implied that the holder had some claim of hegemony over other political centers (Kuhrt 2010, 1:41-42). "King of Kish" became a standard part of Mesopotamian kings' titularies from that point on. The struggle between the various city-states culminated when Lugalzagesi, the king of Uruk, consolidated his power to rule over all of southern Mesopotamia (Kuhrt 2010, 1:43).

Thanks to better record keeping and a more literate society, modern scholars know more about the Early Dynastic/Old Sumerian period, which also means that more details about the composition of Sumerian society is also known. Based on the numerous bureaucratic and legal texts that were written during the period, scholars are able to reconstruct some of the salient points that characterized the non-religious and political aspects of Sumerian society. The texts reveal that households were the principal point of production and consumption during this period, but what constituted a household is slightly different than the modern definition and important to define. A household in the Early Dynastic period could be a nuclear or extended family living under one roof, but it also consisted of temples (which were the households of deities), royal palaces, and large estates that belonged to government officials (Pollack 1999, 117-18). In other words, although the various city-states may have encouraged production and even initiated it to a certain extent in the temples and palaces, the economy of the period was largely de-centralized.

In theory, during the Early Dynastic period, all the land was owned by the king or the temple and was therefore not alienable or inheritable, but in practice, plots of land frequently remained in the hands of a single family over the course of several generations (Pollack 1999, 121). In fact, extant cuneiform documents from the Early Dynastic period record the sale of land, but since there was no money in the form of cash, payments were usually

made in the form of commodities such as grain, silver, or sheep fat (Pollack 1999, 121-22). The labor force in the Early Dynastic period encompassed most members of Sumerian society as the men performed the more rigorous physical tasks, while the women and children were involved in textile production as they collected the wool, weaved, and finished the cloth (Pollack 1999, 123).

The political structure of the Early Dynastic period may have been a divergence from the Uruk period, but artistic currents appear to have followed many of the earlier conventions. Sumerian art during the Early Dynastic period was characterized by the eminent scholar of the ancient Near East, Henri Frankfort, as a line of continuity from earlier periods (Frankfort 1996, 39). Although the essence of Sumerian art may not have changed much from the Uruk to the Early Dynastic period, statuary was a form that was greatly improved during the latter period. It is important to know that all Mesopotamian statuary was created in a religious context and usually housed in temples (Frankfort 1996, 45). This then is quite different than modern forms of sculpture or statuary of even that of the Greeks and Romans who used sculpture to express their ideal images of beauty and to portray emperors and other important people. Perhaps the most important of all types of sculpture was the cult statue, which represented the image of the god who was believed to dwell in a particular temple.

A votive sculpture dating back to circa 2750-2600 BCE

Unfortunately, since sacred cult statues were usually veiled with gold and other precious valuables, most have not been preserved (Frankfort 1996, 46). One of the best exceptions are a pair of two cult statues that were originally part of a group of ten small statues, which comprised part of the decoration of the sanctuary at Tell Asmar (Frankfort 1996, 46). The two statues are a rarity as few cult statues from the ancient Near East have been discovered in modern times (Frankfort 1996, 46). Perhaps the greatest work of Sumerian art, and most well-known, from the Early Dynastic period was discovered in the city of Ur.

The so called “Standard of Ur” is actually a stela, currently housed in the British Museum, which depicts a victory celebration. One side of the stela illustrates a military victory; the king is shown on the top register, taller than everyone else, inspecting prisoners. The second register shows soldiers defeating their enemies and on the bottom register is a scene of wagon bound warriors running over their enemies (Frankfort 1996, 74). The opposite of the ‘war’ side is also a three register relief, but it represents the post-victory celebration; the king is seated on the top register in front of his men, while in the bottom registers defeated peoples bring various animals and produce as tribute (Frankfort 1996, 75). The Sumerians truly established most of the cultural currents that gave Mesopotamia its quintessential character, but non-Sumerian Mesopotamians were not content to sit and watch the Sumerians do everything.

Pictures of parts of the Standard of Ur

Chapter 3: The Rise of the Akkadians

The incessant fighting between the various southern Mesopotamian city-states was not totally extinguished when King Lugalzagesi unified Sumer under one government. In fact, his actions seem to have exasperated the situation even more. Not long into his reign, Lugalzagesi was overthrown by Sargon (2340-2284 BCE), who hailed from the as of yet undiscovered city of Akkad. The city of Akkad was probably located just to the north of Sumer and was not a Sumerian city in that the inhabitants spoke the Semitic language known today as Akkadian (Kuhrt 2010, 1:46). Sargon created a short-lived but far-flung empire that dominated Mesopotamia, but his most enduring achievement was the introduction of Akkadian, which became the language of later Babylon and Assyrian dynasties and was the *lingua franca* of ancient Near Eastern diplomacy for most of the second millennium BCE (Kuhrt 2010, 1:46).

An ancient statue believed to depict Sargon

Although Sargon was a non-Sumerian who promoted and spread his native language, the warrior king also showed a deep respect for Sumerian traditions. The power of Sumerian culture deeply influenced Sargon to the extent that legal and administrative texts began to be inscribed in both Akkadian and Sumerian, and even more importantly, many myths and epics (which will be discussed more thoroughly below) were also written in both languages.

Despite the Akkadians' efforts to establish a dynasty and empire that incorporated all aspects of Mesopotamian culture, past and present, their time

as the rulers of the region was relatively brief. The last ruler of the Akkadian dynasty was Shu-Turul (ca. 2168-2154), who was overthrown by an invading group of outsiders known as the Gutians. Most of the extant texts from the period depict the Gutian hordes as retribution for the Akkadian king Naram-Sin's sacrilege towards Enlil, the head of the Sumerian pantheon (Kuhrt 2010, 1:56).

The collapse of the Akkadian dynasty/empire then returned southern Mesopotamia to a similar state that it was in before, a collection of competing city-states. Since the period after the collapse of the Akkadian dynasty was an interregnum or intermediate period, not many texts have survived, but the few that have paint a picture of the Sumerians slowly rebuilding their culture. The ruler of the city of Lagash, a man named Gudea, appears to have been especially active in this regard. A number of statues of Gudea have survived the ages that reveal a ruler with confidence rather than one preoccupied with the confusion of the period (Frankfort 1996, 93-97).

One statue of Gudea contains a lengthy Sumerian inscription that relates how the *ensi* – a Sumerian word for city king – appropriated resources to build a temple for the god Ningirsu, who was associated with irrigation and fertility and was the patron of Gudea's city of Lagash. Part of the inscription reads, " When he (Gudea) was building the temple of Ningirsu, Ningirsu, his beloved king, opened up for him (all) the (trade) routes from the Upper to the Lower Sea. In the Amanus, the Cedar Mountain, he formed into rafts cedar logs 60 cubits long . . . In the town Ursu in the mountains of Ibla, he formed into rafts the timber of the mountain region: zabalum logs, great uku wood logs and tulubum logs. He made them into roof beams for the Ninnu temple. From Tidanum in the mountains of Martu (West-land) he brought alabaster in great blocks and fashioned it into urpadda slabs and erected them in the temple as barriers . . . From the mountains of Meluhha he imported gold in dust-form and made (out of it) a container (for his mace)." (Prichard 1992, 268-69).

This text demonstrates that despite only ruling one city during an intermediate period, Gudea was still able to establish trade routes from the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea (Upper and Lower Seas) and as far as Egypt (Meluhha). Although Gudea's efforts would seem to indicate that the

next great Sumerian city would be Lagash, history had another plan.

A statue depicting Gudea

Chapter 4: The Third Dynasty of Ur

The Sumerians' sphere of influence during the Third Dynasty

As the intermediate period after the fall of the Akkadian dynasty came to a close, a new dynasty was established in the city of Ur. The Sumerian king list refers to the dynasty as the "Third Dynasty of Ur" but is known by modern scholars as Ur III (Kuhrt 2010, 1:58). The Ur III historical period is also often named the "Neo-Sumerian" period or the "Sumerian Renaissance" because nearly all of the administrative texts were written in Sumerian (Kuhrt 2010, 1:58-59).

The Ur III state encompassed a geographical area that stretched from Sippar in the north, at the point where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers are the closest, to the Persian Gulf in the south (Sharlach 2007, 62). Since more Ur III texts have survived the hands of time than from earlier periods in Sumerian history, modern scholars know much more about the composition of the Ur

III state.

Ur III's administrative structure is well documented in a number of Sumerian inscriptions from the period. The documents show that Mesopotamia was divided into a number of provinces that were each administered by an *ensi* who was probably a member of the local elite (Kuhrt 2010, 1:61). There was also a marchland or frontier zone that was administered by a viceroy who was called a *sukkalmah* in Sumerian (Kuhrt 2010, 1:61). Documents indicate that despite the control that the Ur III kings wielded over Mesopotamia, they did not interfere in the functions of the private sector (Sharlach 2005, 66). The sources also show that although Ur was the capital of the dynasty, other Sumerian cities, such as Uruk, Nippur, and Eridu, continued to play important roles, especially in religious and ceremonial contexts (Kuhrt 2010, 1:64).

The kings of the Ur III created a dynasty that would be remembered for millennia through expansion and a number of other measures. Thanks to the plethora of written document from the Ur III dynasty, scholars have been able to correctly assign achievements to certain kings, and, as a result, personalities of some these rulers begin to emerge. The first king of the Ur III dynasty, Ur-Nammu (2112-2095 BCE), left behind the most impressive and enduring of all Mesopotamian monuments. The Ziggurat of Ur is the only remaining such monument and is often depicted in pictures from the region. Ur-Nammu had the ziggurat built for the moon-god, and it once stood as the center piece in the massive temple complex of Ur (Frankfort 1996, 104). The base measures at 190 by 130 feet and although only two levels remain today, scholars believe that there was once a third level (Frankfort 1996, 104). Ur-Nammu wanted to build the most impressive monument in Mesopotamia, which would immortalize him and his rule; unfortunately for the king his reign and life was cut short when he died in battle (Kuhrt 2010, 1:64).

American soldiers climbing the steps of the Ziggurat

A reconstructed façade of the Ziggurat

Despite Ur-Nammu's short life, when he built the Ziggurat of Ur, he left a legacy that was difficult for others to follow. Nonetheless, his immediate successor tried. Shulgi (2094-2047) was Ur-Nammu's longer lived successor. Records indicate that he carried on many of the same programs as Ur-Nammu with a couple of exceptions. For example, Shulgi introduced the idea of a bigger temple complex that put an end to the previous link between the temple and the neighborhood (Driel 1995, 394). The king's move may seem minor at face value, but the change was carried through subsequent periods and culminated with the Neo-Babylonians, who gated their temple complexes off from the rest of the city.

Another significant achievement by Shulgi was the development and publication of a law code (Kuhrt 2010, 1:64). The creation of a law code may not seem very important historically, but Shulgi's code was written hundreds of years before Hammurabi's more famous one was dictated in Babylon.

The kings of the Ur III state were also some of the first Mesopotamians to become involved in international diplomacy. The art of diplomacy is not relegated only to the modern world. Countless primary texts reveal that the various peoples of the ancient Near East engaged in complex diplomatic relationships that are still being studied and are not yet fully understood. Unfortunately, most of the texts relate to a period just after the period of the current study (second millennium BCE), but a number of extant Sumerian cuneiform documents reveal that the later Babylonians and Assyrians may have followed the Sumerians in this as well.

Unfortunately, no treaties or official correspondence texts have survived or are known to exist between Ur III kings and their contemporaries elsewhere, such as Egypt, but a number of administrative texts are extant that can paint a basic picture of the situation. To begin with, it appears that the Sumerians scheduled their diplomatic and political events to coincide with religious observations (Sharlach 2005, 17). Sumerian rituals and religious observations will be discussed more in detail below, but it is important to point out at this point that the Ur III state effectively functioned as a theocracy, like most kingdoms in the ancient Near East.

The documents also reveal that the Ur III state had a separate branch of government that was dedicated to foreign policy. The office that conducted foreign policy was known as the *sukkalmah*, and as stated earlier, the word is often translated as "viceroy," but as Sharlach writes, in order to compare it to a more familiar modern term it can also be translated as "secretary of state" (Sharlach 2005, 18). The *sukkalmah* acted as an intermediary between the king and any foreign emissary who was visiting Sumer and also acted as interpreter if the emissaries could not speak Sumerian or Akkadian (Sharlach 2005, 19).

Foreign emissaries' trips to Sumer corresponded to holy festivals on the Sumerian calendar, so modern scholars believe that these men followed the king and his court to the different festivals throughout the year (Sharlach 2005, 20). Each of these festivals was a ritual renewal of the king's legitimate right to rule Sumer and Akkad, so it was imperative that any foreign emissary who wished to curry favor with an Ur III king attend these celebrations

(Sharlach 2005, 22). To the kings of the Ur III state politics and religion were inexplicably intertwined, so therefore all business of state needed to be conducted under the watchful eyes of the gods and goddesses and with their consent. The extant diplomatic documents from the Ur III dynasty represent a long tradition of Sumerian scholarship that began in the Uruk period and was inherited by later Mesopotamian peoples such as the Babylonians and Assyrians.

Chapter 5: Sumerian Culture

Pictures of Sumerian tablets

During the late Uruk period (ca. 3200-2900 BCE) the Sumerians first began to use writing, and within a short time, some the earliest literary collections began in southern Mesopotamia (Kuhrt 2010, 1:26). That said, it would be difficult to characterize the first writings as “books,” at least as they are known today. First, the Sumerians wrote on clay tablets that were then baked in an oven, and the nature of such a process meant that each writing was limited in space since the entire contents of a book had to fit unto both sides of a tablet. Moreover, the very idea of a title, which is taken for granted today, had not even been invented (Dalby 1986, 480).

Despite the inherent problems concerning record keeping that the Sumerians were presented with, they compiled the world’s first bibliographies. Sumerian “books” were identified in bibliographical entries by the first words in the text, which is known as the incipit (Dably 1986, 480). In the just 1,000 year period from the late Uruk period through the end of Ur III dynasty the Sumerians were able to create a large and diverse collection of literary works that covered several different genres.

If one is to take the most basic definition of “literature” as any written material, then administrative and legal texts would be at the top of the list in ancient Sumer, at least in terms of sheer numbers. Legal texts, in both Old

and Neo-Sumerian, may not be exciting to modern readers who see them as historical annals or mythological epics, but they probably help the historian more in reconstructing Sumerian society. Many legal texts concern the division of labor and how temples appropriated workers. For example, an Old Sumerian legal text describes how a group of fishermen went to sea under the employment of the goddess Baba. The text says, “Uru-ki-erima, En-udana, Lugal-naga-ra-na, Ki-bi-ba-tila, Shesh-tur, Ur-Enki, Ur-Ninsig, Lugal-mu, Nesag, (and) Lugal-sha-la-tuk, the overseer, have gone ahead; as for Uda, A-lu-lila, (and) En-tu, Lugal-sha-la-tuk, the fisherman, brought about their dispatch. A total of 12 men, who are sea-fishermen (in the employ) of the goddess Baba, have gone to the sea, with Lugal-sha-[la-tuk] as their overseer.” (Pritchard 1992, 217).

To be in the employ of a deity simply means that the worker was contracted to that deity’s local temple in some fashion. Thus, in this case, the temple was the center of the “household” economy discussed above (Pollack 1999, 119), and the fishermen contributed their labor to the maintenance and upkeep of the temple “family.”

The numerous extant Sumerian legal texts also reveal much about the nature personal relationships in Mesopotamia. The status of women in ancient Mesopotamia was considerably lower than that of the modern world and even much lower than what women in ancient Egypt enjoyed, but legal texts show that they were not without some rights. Women were allowed to seek divorces and settlements from their husbands, and although it is impossible to say for sure how common divorce was among the Sumerians, there are a number of surviving texts that allow a glimpse into the proceedings. One such Neo-Sumerian text reads, “Final judgment: Lu-Utu, the son of Nig-Baba, divorced Geme-Enlil. Dugidu, an officer and official took oath that Geme-Enlil had taken her stand (and) said, ‘By the king! Give me 10 shekels of silver (and) I will not enter claim against you,’ (and) that she made him forfeit 10 shekels of silver. Ur . . . (was) the deputy; Ur-Lama (was) the governor.” (Pritchard 1992, 217).

Of all the known types of Sumerian legal texts, perhaps the most influential was the law code. The importance of Shulgi’s Law Code cannot be overstated, if only because it seems to have invented the genre. Law codes

allowed early societies to set their cultural norms in writing, which helped to legitimize the rule of a king, dynasty, or government. The earliest Sumerian law codes were also replicated by other ancient Near Eastern peoples, such as the Babylonians, Assyrians, and Hebrews, who created more famous examples like Hammurabi's Law Code and the Ten Commandments.

Today, Sumerian law codes appear simple but brutal, with most crimes having serious consequences. Here is an example of a Neo-Sumerian law code: "If (a man accidentally) buffeted a woman of the free-citizen class and caused her to have a miscarriage, he must pay 10 shekels of silver. If (a man deliberately) struck a woman of the free-citizen class and caused her to have a miscarriage, he must pay one-third mina of silver. If (a son) has aid to his father and to his mother: 'You are not my father; you are not my mother,' he forfeits (his heir's rights to) house, field, orchard, slaves, and (any other) property, and they may sell him (into slavery) for money at full value." (Pritchard, 1992, 525-26). Clearly, the Sumerians lived a very ordered life, but also one that could be very unforgiving towards those who transgressed the laws.

The Sumerians were the first people in the world to write legal texts and law codes, and they were also the first people to contemplate the idea of history, but perhaps not surprisingly, their idea of history and how they wrote about it differs from the modern concept. Modern ideas of history and the practice of writing and collecting historical documents, often referred to as historiography, are largely derived from the Greeks, who first wrote of history in a secular, inquiry based manner (Fornara 1988). This is not to say that the people before the Greeks did not have a concept of history or write about history, but pre-Greek concepts of history and historiography were often produced in a theological context.

The Sumerians had no word that corresponds to the modern English word "history" (Speiser 1983, 38), but they were keenly aware of their past and recorded it in what is known today as the "Sumerian King List." The Sumerian King List purports to list the kings of various southern Mesopotamian cities from the beginning of time until the 19th century BCE (Kuhrt 2010, 1:29). Of particular interest in the Sumerian King List is the epic flood and the fact that all of the kings before the flood are given

inhuman lengths of reigns, but the post-diluvial kings are credited with normal length reigns, many of which can be corroborated by other sources (Kuhrt 2010, 1:29).

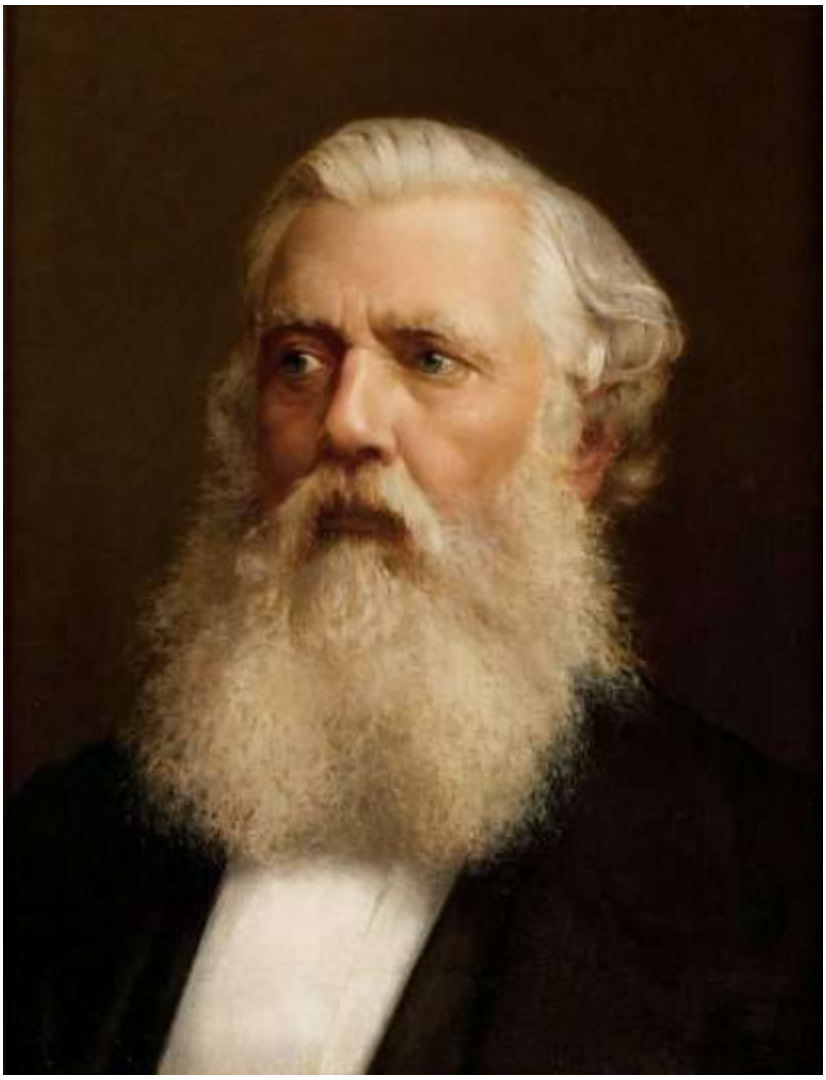
Part of the Sumerian King List depicts this transition from mythical/pseudo-historical kings to historical kings: “When kingship was lowered from heaven, kingship was (first) in Eridu. (In) Eridu, A-lulim (became) king and ruled 28,800 years, Alalgar ruled 36,000 years. Two kings (thus) ruled it for 64,800 years . . . After the Flood had swept over (the earth) (and) when kingship was lowered (again) from heaven, kingship was (first) in Kish . . . En-me-kar, son of Mes-kiag-gasher, he who built Uruk, became king and ruled 420 years . . . the divine Gilgamesh, his father was a lilu, a high priest of Kullab, ruled 126 years; Ur-Nungal, son of Gilgamesh, rule 30 years . . . Uruk was defeated in battle, its kingship was removed to Ur.” (Pritchard 1992, 265-66). Modern scholars point out that the Sumerian King List and other Sumerian historiographical texts are more important for the perspective they provide on the Sumerians’ sense of the past than as sources of actual Sumerian history and chronology (van de Mieroop 2007, 44).

The flood that divides the Sumerian King List between mythical and historical played a big role in the literature, history, and mythology not just of the Sumerians but also all later Mesopotamian peoples. Perhaps the most famous Sumerian work, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, is a mythic tale of adventure that relates many Sumerian ideas of kingship. *Gilgamesh* was not only the first Sumerian epic tale, but it is also the oldest known epic tale in human history, pre-dating *The Iliad & The Odyssey* by over a millennium.

The origins of *Gilgamesh* can be traced back to the fourth millennium, when Sumer had catastrophic floods inundate and destroy the land to the point that they impacted urban culture, Sumerian legends, and later literature (van Soden 1994, 16). Although the Sumerians had developed writing by the late fourth millennium BCE, the first written versions of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* are dated later, because as is common with myths and epics throughout most human cultures, the narratives spent a considerable time being transmitted orally before being written down (Vansina 1985, 118). Although virtually nothing is known about the transition from oral to written document that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* made, much more is known about its

survival until the modern period. Most of what today exists as the *Gilgamesh* tale is derived from Akkadian language copies of the original Sumerian. The 7th century BCE Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, sent scholars to the libraries of the southern Mesopotamian cities of Babylon, Uruk, and Nippar to collect, copy, and translate the epic from the original Sumerian into the contemporary language of Akkadian (Sandars 1972, 8).

Not long after the Assyrian king had copies made and deposited in the Assyrian libraries in Ashur and Nineveh, the Assyrian Empire collapsed and the *Epic of Gilgamesh* was lost to the world for over 2,000 years. The 19th century CE witnessed great expansion in the understanding of humanity's past, particularly due to advances in archaeology and the philology of ancient, "dead" languages, and the first version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* was discovered in 1839 by Englishman Austen Henry Layard when he excavated the ruins of the Assyrian city Nineveh (Sandars 1972, 9). It would not be until decades later in 1872 that another Englishman, George Smith, announced the publication of the "flood account" part of the epic. The first Sumerian account of the epic was discovered by American John Punnet Peters while he and an American team from the University of Pennsylvania excavated the city of Nippur in 1888-89 (Sandars 1972, 11).



Layard

Since the late 19th century, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* has continued to inspire and intrigue modern readers as its themes resonate with new generations. Scholarly consensus exists that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* was at least partially historical, as a king named Gilgamesh reigned in the city of Uruk sometime in the first half of the 3rd millennium BCE (during the late Uruk phase) (Sandars 1972, 20). The epic is also important culturally because it relates many mythological aspects of Sumerian culture, particularly the roles that the numerous deities play in the story. In fact, when the various Semitic speaking peoples established dynasties in Mesopotamia after the Sumerians, they accepted the Sumerian pantheon along with the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, although they altered the deities' names to fit their native languages (Sandars 1972,

23).

Sumerian cosmogony and theology is reflected in numerous sections of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in particular when it described how the hero of the tale was endowed with numerous semi-divine attributes. The tale states, “When the gods created Gilgamesh they gave him a perfect body. Shamash the glorious sun endowed him with beauty, Adad the god of the storm endowed him with courage, the great gods made his beauty perfect, surpassing all others, terrifying like a great wild bull. Two thirds they made him god and one third man. In Uruk he built walls, a great rampart, and the temple of blessed Eanna for the god of the firmament Anu, and for Ishtar the goddess of love.” (Sandars 1972, 61).

Although the *Epic of Gilgamesh* clearly contains Sumerian religious and theological philosophies, there is no evidence that it was ever recited as part of a religious ritual (Sandars 1972, 30), and of all the Sumerian philosophical ideas that are discussed in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the idea of kingship is given the most attention. Since the Sumerians practiced a traditional monarchical type government, the idea of kinship played an integral role in the composition of their society. Sumerian kingship will be analyzed more thoroughly below, but the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is a good source to understand how the Sumerians articulated the idea early in their history. In the tale, Gilgamesh travels throughout the world with his companion, Enkidu, in order to unravel the mysteries of life and what his purpose is in the world. The gods then tell the king that immortality is for the gods and goddesses, but their gift to man was kingship. The epic reads, “Ninsun, who is as strong as a wild ox in the byre, she was the mother who bore you, and now you are raised above all men, and Enlil has given you the kingship, for your strength surpasses the strength of men.’ So Enkidu and Gilgamesh embraced and their friendship was sealed.” (Sandars 1972, 69)

Gilgamesh again tries to learn the secrets of immortality, and whether he, who was born to a goddess, can achieve life after death. The gods reiterate to Gilgamesh that he should not worry about something that he can never have and should instead focus on being a just ruler. The text continues, “The father of the gods has given you kingship, such is your destiny, everlasting life is not your destiny . . . He has given you unexampled supremacy over the

people, victory in battle from which no fugitive returns, in forays and assaults from which there is no going back. But do not abuse this power, deal justly with your servants in the palace, deal justly before Shamash." (Sandars 1972, 70).

In the end, Gilgamesh is resigned to fact that although he will never attain immortality in a divine sense, his name will live forever through his deeds, which is when he decides to take a cedar collecting expedition to Lebanon. The epic says, "I will go to the country where the cedar is cut. I will set up my name where the names of famous men are written; and where no man's name is written I will raise a monument to the gods." (Sandars 1972, 72). Gilgamesh represented the perfect Sumerian king: strong, virile, wise, and delegated by the pantheon for the post.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* details some important aspects of early Sumerian kingship, but the tale is best known today for its detailed account of a monumental flood. Upon first reading, comparisons to the biblical book of Genesis comes to mind for many. In the epic, humanity has angered Enlil, the head of Sumerian pantheon and the patron god of Nippur, with their hubris and arrogance, so he decided to destroy the earth with a flood. However, before the flood occurs, the god of wisdom and the patron of Eridu, Ea/Enki, warns Gilgamesh: "Enlil heard the clamour and he said to the gods in council, 'The uproar of mankind is intolerable and sleep is no longer possible by reason of the babel.' So the gods agreed to exterminate mankind. Enlil did this, but Ea because of his oath warned me in a dream. He whispered their word to my house of reeds, 'Reed-house, reed-house! Wall, O wall, hearken reed-house, wall reflect; O man of Shurrupak, son of Ubara-Tutu; tear down your house and build a boat, abandon possessions and look for life, despise worldly goods and save your soul alive." (Sandars 1972, 108).

Although the Gilgamesh flood account begins in a similar fashion to the Biblical narrative, it also bears some similarities to an ancient Egyptian myth, *The Destruction of Mankind*. In the Egyptian myth, the gods were also angered with humanity, which had grown arrogant and sacrilegious, so they decided to wipe out all human life.

The Gilgamesh flood account is also quite detailed in the size of the vessel the king built and what he took along with him: "The ground-space was one

acre, each side of the deck measured one hundred and twenty cubits, making a square. I built six decks below, seven in all, I divided them into nine sections with bulkheads between . . . I loaded into her all that I had of gold and of living things, my family, my kin, the beast of the field both wild and tame, and all the craftsmen. I sent them on board, for the time that Shamash had ordained was already fulfilled." (Sandars 1972, 109-110).

Once Gilgamesh filled his ship, he had to brave the storm in order to reach his salvation. This part of the account also shares similarities with the Biblical account: "For six days and six nights the winds blew, torrent and tempest and flood overwhelmed the world, tempest and flood raged together like warring hosts. When the seventh day dawned the storm form the south subsided, the sea grew calm, the flood was stilled." (Sandars 1972, 111).

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is an epic tale that relates many ideas of ancient Sumerian kingship in the context of a narrative myth, but while it may be enduring and endearing to modern readers, it was not the only Sumerian myth. To the Sumerians, their gods were a lot like humans; the gods lived in world where they each had households, spouses, children and servants, both in the heavens and on earth (van de Mieroop 2007, 46). The Sumerian view of their deities is perhaps best captured in a genre of literature known as "sacred marriage texts." A number of these texts revolve around the relationship of the Dumuzi, the Sumerian god of the underworld, and his divine consort Inanna, who was known by the Babylonians and Assyrians as Ishtar, the goddess of love and war. One of these texts, known as the "Pride of Pedigree," depicts a playful banter between the two where the subject is their familial lines. The text begins with Inanna/Ishtar telling her mate of her family's greatness:

"Without my mother, you would be driven into street (and) . . . plain,

Young man, without my mother, you would be driven into street (and) . . . plain,

Without my mother Ningal, you would be driven into street (and) . . . plain,

Without the 'Lady of the Holy Reed' you would be driven into street (and) . . . plain,

Without Father Sin, you would be driven into street (and) . . . plain

Without my brother Utu, you would be driven into street (and) . . . plain." (Pritchard 1992, 637)

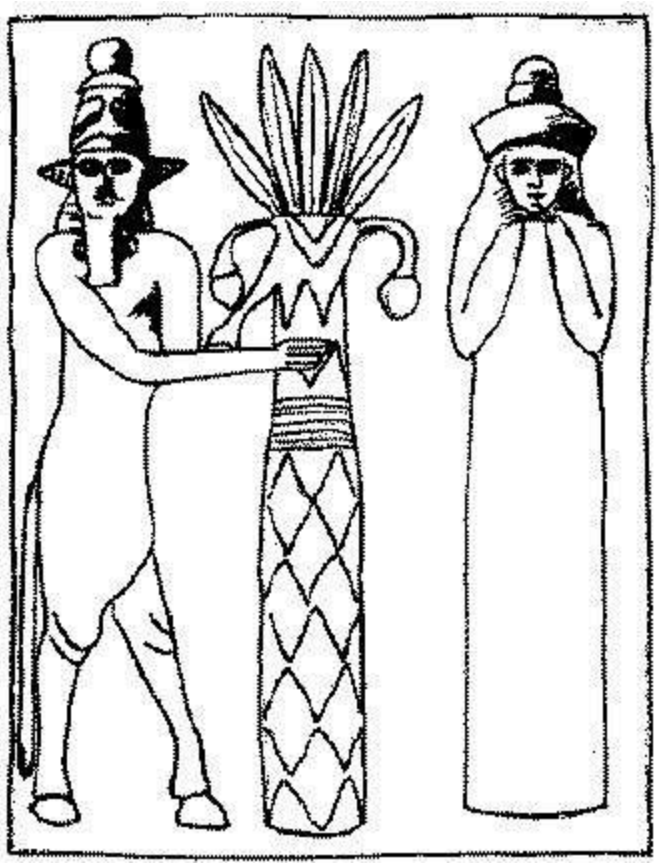
Dumuzi then responds by stating that his family is every bit as good as Inanna's and proves it by listing his divine genealogy: "Young lady, do not start a quarrel, Inanna, let us talk it over, Inanna, do not start a quarrel, Ninegalla let us take counsel together. My father is as good as your father, Inanna, let us talk it over; My mother is as good as your mother, Ninegalla, let us take counsel together; Gesthinanna is as good as . . . , Inanna, let us talk it over; I am as good as Utu, Ninegalla, let us take counsel together; Enki is as good as Sin, Inanna, let us talk it over; Sirtur is as good as Ningal, Ninegalla, let us take counsel together." (Pritchard 1992, 637).

The rich character of these sacred marriage texts demonstrates that the Sumerians were quite imaginative when it came to their gods, given that they developed complex genealogies and relationships for them, but on the other hand, they ascribed similar human foibles to the divine. It also indicates that the ancient Sumerians had a sense of humor.

Another popular mythological literary genre in ancient Sumer was the holy hymn. Sumerian hymns, similar to modern hymns, praised certain gods, but there was also a subgenre devoted to royal hymns. Many of the Sumerian divine hymns revolved around the chief god and patron of Nippur, Enlil. One hymn in particular gives praise to Enlil and his home, known as "the Ekur" for being the legitimate and powerful ruler. Part of the hymn reads, "Enlil, the shepherd upon whom you gaze (favorably), the legitimate one, whom you have raised over the land. The foreign land at his hand, the foreign land at his foot, (As well as) the most distant of foreign lands you make subservient to him, like refreshing water, overflowing goods from all over, their offerings and heavy tribute, they brought into the storehouse, into the main courtyard they conducted (their) gifts, into the Ekur, the 'lapis- lazuli' house they brought them in homage . . . Without Enlil, the Great Mountain, no cities would be built, no settlements founded, no stalls would be built, no sheepfold erected, no king would be raised high." (Pritchard 1992, 575).

The hymns display the reverence that the Sumerians had for their gods and

goddesses, as they attributed the very founding and success of their civilization to the heavens. Thus, it's no surprise that religion was important to the culture as well. Like most of the religions in the ancient Near East, the Sumerian religion was cultic in nature, which meant that participants were required to perform certain rituals in order to appease the gods and goddesses. As mentioned earlier, the Sumerians designated certain localities to be the abode, or "headquarters," of specific deities, and some cities exerted a disproportionate power, as compared to their traditional political or military influence, simply by being the abode of an influential deity. For instance, Nippur never exercised the political or economic power that other cities such as Uruk or Ur did, but it remained an important theological and symbolic city for any king to hold who wished to control southern Mesopotamia because it was the home of Enlil, the head of the Sumerian pantheon (Driel 1995, 393). Although each Sumerian city focused on particular gods and goddesses, they all worshiped these gods in much the same fashion.



A depiction of Enlil and his wife Ninlil

Religion enveloped nearly every aspect of Sumerian society, as most inhabitants played some role in the divine cults – which could range from officiating rituals to providing crops and livestock to be sacrificed – and most men were obliged to do so (Kuhrt 2010, 1:33). At the head of society was the king, who sometimes acted as high priest and always had the power to increase a temple's estates or appoint certain individuals to cultic offices (Kuhrt 2010, 1:33). Primary source evidence reveals that by the Ur III period, many of the cultic offices had become hereditary and were inherited in much the same way that land or money is today (Driel 1995, 394).

Among the cultic offices/roles that were most important, other than the king, were the priests who held the title of *en*. Throughout the Ur III dynasty, the *en* priests exercised considerable theological and economic power throughout Sumer (Sharlach 2007, 70). The *en* priests had a special residence, called the *gipar*, but they were not cloistered as monks were in the medieval Europe (Sharlach 2007, 70). The powerful office of the *en* priests was abolished after the collapse of the Ur III dynasty and never returned in subsequent Mesopotamian dynasties (Sharlach 2007, 70).

Chapter 6: Kingship and the Decline of the Sumerians

The Sumerian concept of kingship is a bit more complicated than that of their contemporaries because it evolved from the Uruk through the Ur III periods. The evolution of Sumerian kingship was quite unique when compared to their neighbors, for example: the ancient Egyptians always considered their kings divine, while the Babylonians and Assyrians considered their kings as divinely inspired, but not actual gods. Early Sumerian ideas of kingship resembled those of later Mesopotamian peoples, but during the Ur III dynasty it shared many similarities with the Egyptian model.

During the Uruk period and in the Early Dynastic period, kings of the various Sumerian cities were viewed as and carried out functions like those of the semi-legendary Gilgamesh. The king was seen as having a privileged relationship with the gods, particularly the patron of this particular city, which was appeased by attending to the deity's needs (Kuhrt 2010, 1:33). Some of those needs were also articulated in the Gilgamesh epic, which included building monuments and temples, ruling justly, and officiating as the high priest in cultic functions (Kuhrt 2010, 1:33). In fact, the head of society in the Uruk period was a priest-king, who was as much priest as king and viewed as divinely appointed but not a god (van de Mieroop 2007, 27).

The traditional idea of Sumerian kingship began to change when the Akkadian king Sargon established his short-lived empire. After Sargon conquered southern Mesopotamia for the most part he represented a bridge in the Sumerian concept of kingship rather than an abrupt change (Kuhrt 2010, 1:55). Even after Sargon and his dynasty fell by the wayside, the kings of southern Mesopotamia continued to follow the concept of one city dominating others, as evidenced by the continued use of the title "King of Kish." At the same time, titles such as "king of the lands" and "king of the four corners of the world" also began to be used (Kuhrt 2010, 1:55).

Despite Sargon following a policy of continuity in regards to Sumerian kingship traditions, one of his Akkadian successors, Naram-Sin (2254-2218 BCE), initiated a revolutionary kingship philosophy that was followed for the most part by the Sumerian speaking kings of the Ur III dynasty. Naram-Sin

radically changed the idea of Mesopotamian kingship when he declared himself to be divine (van de Mieroop 2007, 70). Although Naram-Sin was often viewed by later Mesopotamians in a negative light (Pritchard 1992, 646-51), his idea of divine kingship was followed later on by the Sumerian kings of the Ur III dynasty. The first king of the Ur III dynasty, Ur-Nammu, mentioned almost in passing that he was the product of a divine birth. His Law Code claimed, "After An and Enlil had turned over the Kingship of Ur to Nanna, at that time did Ur-Nammu, son born of (the goddess) Ninsun, for his beloved mother who bore him, in accordance with his principles of equity and truth . . . He set up the seven . . . Nammahni, the *ensi* of Lagash he slew . . . Then did Ur-Nammu, the mighty warrior king of Ur, king of Sumer and Akkad, by the might of Nanna, lord of the city (of Ur), and in accordance with the true word of Utu, establish equity in the land (and) he banished malediction, violence, and strife." (Pritchard 1992, 523).

Most of the text concerns how the new king established his legitimacy and that of his dynasty through the establishment of laws in the land of Sumer. In essence, his divine lineage was downplayed, and he never demanded to be worshiped as a god.

Ur-Nammu's successor, Shulgi, took the concept of divine kingship to its next logical level. At the time, royal hymns became a common form of literature that the kings of the dynasty used to emphasize their legitimacy, divine birth, and physical prowess, and a royal hymn dated to the reign of Shulgi proclaimed both the king's divinity and his prowess:

"I, the king, a hero from the (mother's) womb am I,

I, Shulgi, a mighty man from (the day) I was born

Am I,

A fierce-eyed lion, born of the ushumgal am I,

Herdsman, shepherd of the blackheads am I,

The trustworthy, the god of all the lands am I,

The son born of Ninsun am I,

Called to the heart of holy An am I,

He who was blessed by Enlil am I,

Shulgi, the beloved of Ninlil am I,

Faithfully nurtured by Nintu am I,

Endowed with wisdom by Enki am I." (Pritchard 1992, 585).

Shulgi lists his divine mother as Ninsun, who was a relatively minor Sumerian goddess but was credited as being the mother of the legendary Gilgamesh. Shulgi therefore sought not only to establish his partial divinity in this hymn but also connect himself to the archetype of all Sumerian kings. Shulgi also portrayed himself as the protector of the Sumerian people (often called "blackheads" in Sumerian texts) by using the metaphor of a good shepherd.

As strong as the Ur III state was, it was like so many other dynasties destined to collapse in antiquity, and there were several factors that played a role. Internal weakness and discord played a large role in the decline of the Ur III state, but ecological problems, primarily concerned with irrigation, may have also played a role (Sharlach 2007, 62-63). If anything, these factors were tied together; problems with a lack of rainfall or irrigation issues could only become an existential threat if the kings of the dynasty did not have the proper resources, manpower, or authority to deal with such issues.

Indeed, the late Ur III kings' inability to properly deal with irrigation or ecological problems may have been a consequence of their own predecessors' success. As the Ur III state expanded during the reigns of the early kings to encompass most of Mesopotamia, the state became overextended and struggled to control such a large area. The late Ur III kings had a difficult time maintaining communication lines, collecting taxes and tribute, and above all protecting the long borders of their state, which were ultimately doomed to suffer attack from outsiders (Kuhrt 2010, 1:69).

Ironically, the fatal blows came from some of the same sources as those that brought down the Akkadian dynasty, which allowed the Ur III to form in the first place. The destruction of the Ur III state at the hands of outsiders is recorded in numerous texts from later periods. The "lamentation hymns," typical of Mesopotamian historiography, generously mix history and myth,

but both a sense of what happened and the reasons for it can be gleaned from these texts.

When a number of the different texts are collected and read together, a picture begins to form of who wrought the destruction on Ur, why the destruction happened, and what were the results of the destruction. In one text, the Subarians and Elamites are named as the culprits: “His righteous city which has been destroyed – bitter is its lament. His Ur which has been destroyed – bitter is its lament. They lament which is bitter – O city, set up thy lament . . . The Subarians and the Elamites, the destroyers made of it thirty shekels. The righteous house they break up with the pickaxe; the people groan. The city they make into ruins; the people groan. Its lady cries: ‘Alas for my city…Alas for my house.’ Ningal cries: ‘Alas for my city’…As for me, the woman, my city has been destroyed, my house too has been destroyed; O Nanna, Ur has been destroyed, its people have been dispersed.” (Pritchard 1992, 455-461).

Other texts are clearer as to why the Ur III state collapsed, and like others who found themselves in similar situations, they called it punishment from the gods. For many, the Elamites were just the tool of the Sumerian gods who were angered that their own people had abandoned them. One lament reads:

“That kingship be carried off from the land,

That its face be directed to inimical soil,

That in accord with the command of An (and)

Enlil, ‘law and order’ cease to exist –

(All this was) after An had frowned upon all the

Lands,

After Enlil had set his (friendly) face to inimical

Soil,

After Nintu had prostrated her (own) creatures,

After Enki had overturned (the course of) the Tigris

(and) Euphrates,
After Utu had cursed the roads (and highways . . .
An, Enlil, Enki, (and) Ninhursag decreed (as) its fate –
The fate decreed by them cannot be changed . . .
Enlil brought down Elam, the foe, form the mountain,
He made Nanshe, the princely daughter, dwell in
a strange city,
He put Ninmar to the flames in (her) shrine
Gubba,
Its silver (and) lapus lazuli is carried off in big boats . . .
On Hursagkalamma, the house of Kish, an evil hand
Was placed . . .
Before Enlil a lament was set up in his city, the shrine
Nippur . . .
Girsu, the city of heroes, was turned into a cowardly
Place . . .
Oh Enki, your city has been cursed, it has been made
into enemy territory,
Why do you reckon us among those who have been
displaced from Eridu . . .
Below, the Elamites like those who bring forth
Woe, brandish their weapons,
Above,, like chaff blown about by the wind, the
Steppe . . .

Ur, the great wild ox that (formerly) stepped forth

Confidently (in combat), has been made prostrate." (Pritchard 1992, 612-19).

After Ur and the rest of Sumer was ravaged, the Sumerians suffered one final humiliation when the last king of the Ur III dynasty, Ibbi-Sin (2028-2004 BCE), was captured and sent to Elam as prisoner (van de Mieroop 2007, 84). Ibbi-Sin's capture was the end of Sumerian political power in Mesopotamia, as the Ur III dynasty was the last Sumerian speaking dynasty to hold power in the region.

Although most lamentations that concern the collapse of the Ur III state are vague and somewhat formulaic in their treatment of the situation, Ibbi-Sin is mentioned in a few of them. The lamentations name the Sumerian king specifically as a transgressor and recipient of divine anger: "On that day a defiling hand was placed over the king-ship of the land, its tiara (and) crown worn on the head were both . . ., All the lands . . . their submission and respect, of Ur, the shrine of great offerings – its offerings [were changed]. Nanna overtu[rned] his people as numerous as [ewes]. Its king was depressed in his splendid palace, Ibbi-Sin was filled with gloom in his splendid palace, he shed bitter tears in his heart-rejoicing 'house of life.' The flood crushes the earth, wipes out everything, it roared like a great storm over the earth, who could escape it! To destroy all the cities, to destroy all the houses, to make the liar superior to the honest man." (Pritchard 1992, 613-14).

It is important to remember that Sumerian historiography consisted of a generous blend of myth and history to create a narrative that probably tells modern scholars more details about how the Sumerians interpreted their fate than what actually transpired. There is no doubt among modern historians and archeologists that the Ur III state was destroyed and that the subsequent power vacuum was filled by a new non-Sumerian dynasty from the city of Isin (van de Mieroop 2007, 84), but many of the details in the lamentations are historically and factually questionable. For instance, there is no evidence that a flood affected Ur as the last text relates, but the idea of a flood serves as a metaphor that gives a glimpse into the ancient Sumerian mind. The flood idea was an important part of Sumerian mythology as related in the *Epic of*

Gilgamesh, and its inclusion in the Lamentations of the Destruction of Ur indicate that the idea was a deep seated one in the minds of the Sumerians.

Perhaps it was inevitable that Sumerian culture would decline as it did at Ur because, as Nancy Sandars (1972, 22-23) noted, the Sumerians had a pervasive pessimistic outlook on life that "lay partly in the precariousness of life the city-states, dependent on vagaries of flood and drought and turbulent neighbors."

Although the Ur III dynasty was the last Sumerian state and the Sumerian people subsequently assimilated into the greater Mesopotamian culture, the Sumerians left a great legacy. After the fall of the Ur III state, the Sumerian language gradually fell out of use as a spoken language, but it continued to survive as a liturgical and literary language (Dalby 1986, 476). The Babylonians translated numerous Sumerian texts, most notably the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, into Akkadian and often made their own annotations to the texts (van de Mieroop 2007, 177-79). Perhaps a good comparison to understand the survival of the Sumerian language would be how Latin evolved from the language of the Romans to that of the medieval Catholic Church. After Rome collapsed in the 5th century CE, Latin ceased to be a spoken language in Europe, but it survived as a liturgical and scientific language. Sumerian appears to have been treated in a similar way by the Babylonians and then later by the Assyrians and others in the region.

The Babylonians were not the only ancient Near Eastern people to be influenced by Sumerian religion and literature. The Hittites, who were based to the north in Anatolia, also demonstrated an affinity for certain aspects of Sumerian culture, especially their literature. Akkadian and Hittite language copies of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* from the Hittite capital of Hattusa have survived, demonstrating a love for the classic epic that spanned multiple centuries and cultures (Macqueen 2003, 149). Although the Hittites never copied the epic from its original Sumerian as the Babylonians did, their copies of the text demonstrate an unseen Sumerian influence in their culture.

The people who carried the Sumerian literary tradition forward the most were the Assyrians, despite being best known today as one of the villainous peoples in the Old Testament and for being the scourge of the Near East in the first half of the 1st millennium BCE (van de Mieroop 2007, 229-69).

However, aside from their martial society and military endeavors, the Assyrians clearly admired learning and history. King Ashurbanipal (668-627 BCE) in particular is known for his long, detailed annals of military campaigns and his collection of a variety of texts that he placed in his library in Nineveh (van de Mieroop 2007, 263). Ashurbanipal's library included a full record of the Sumerian lexicon with Akkadian translations and a large group of tablets that consisted of incantations and prayers in Sumerian (van de Mieroop 2007, 263). Thanks to Ashurbanipal's library and the numerous Akkadian translations of Sumerian texts discovered from there in modern times, the Sumerian language is known to the modern world (Dalby 1986, 476). In fact, it is precisely these bilingual Akkadian-Sumerian tablets that formed to the key to the decipherment of the enigmatic Sumerian language (Ziskind 1972, 35).

Even after the Assyrian Empire was destroyed by the Chaldeans and Medes in 612 BCE, memories of the Sumerians continued to linger in the minds of the peoples of the ancient Near East. Although the Assyrians were the last people to extensively record Sumerian texts, other Near Eastern peoples, such as the Hebrews, continued to write about the Sumerians. The Old Testament is the most famous extant historical source of the Hebrew people, and while the Sumerians are never mentioned by name in the Old Testament, the original seat of their power base, Uruk, is referred to in Genesis as "Erech." Concerning the genealogy of Nimrod, the Old Testament states, "And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Ashur and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth and Calah." (Gen. 10:8-11). According to Hebrew historiography, Nimrod was the predecessor of the Sumerian city of Uruk, as well as Akkad and the Assyrian cities of Nineveh and Kalah to the north.

The Biblical mention of Uruk would be the last mention of Sumerian culture for several centuries, and for a long time, people knew virtually nothing about the Sumerians or their phenomenal culture save for the biblical mentions of "Erech." It was not until the cuneiform script and the various languages of Mesopotamia began to be deciphered in the 19th century that the true extent of the Sumerians' accomplishments were understood. As

scholars began to study the language and culture of the Sumerians it became apparent that these people were not just a minor footnote in ancient Near Eastern history; they were truly responsible for inventing writing, libraries, and cities.

Online Resources

A History of Sumer and Akkad by Leonard King

The Babylonian Story of the Deluge as Told by Assyrian Tablets from Nineveh by E.A. Wallis Budge

The Assyrians: The History of the Most Prominent Empire of the Ancient Near East by Charles River Editors

Babylon: The Rise and Fall of Ancient Mesopotamia's Greatest City by Charles River Editors

The Hittites: The History and Legacy of the Bronze Age's Forgotten Empire by Charles River Editors

Bibliography

Algaze, Guillermo. 1989. "The Uruk Expansion: Cross-cultural Exchange in Early Mesopotamian Civilization." *Current Anthropology* 30: 571-608.

Anthony, David W. 2007. *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Curtis, J.E. and J.E. Reade, eds. 1995. *Art and Empire: Treasures from Assyria in the British Museum*. London: British Museum Press.

Dalby, Andrew. 1986. "The Sumerian Catalogs." *Journal of Library History* 21: 475-487.

Driel, G. van. 1995. "Nippur and the Inanna Temple during the Ur III Period." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 38: 393-406.

Fornara, Charles William. 1988. *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece*

and Rome. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Frankfort, Henri. 1996. *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

Kitchen, Kenneth A. 2003. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans.

Kuhrt, Amélie. 2010. *The Ancient Near East: c. 3000-330 BCE*. 2 vols. London: Routledge.

Macqueen, J.G. 2003. *The Hittites and Their Contemporaries in Asia Minor*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Mieroop, Marc van de. 2007. *A History of the Ancient Near East: ca. 3000-323 BCE*. 2nd ed. London: Blackwell.

Pollock, Susan. 1999. *Ancient Mesopotamia: The Eden that Never Was*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pritchard, James B, ed. 1992. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. 3rd ed. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Sharlach, Tonia. 2007. "Social Change and the Transition from the Third Dynasty of Ur to the Old Babylonian Kingdoms c. 2112-1595 BCE." In *Regime Change in the Ancient Near East and Egypt: From Sargon of Agade to Saddam Hussein*, ed. Harriet Crawford, 61-72. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2005. "Diplomacy and the Rituals of Politics at the Ur III Court." *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 57: 17-29

Sandars, Nancy K., ed. 1972. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Revised ed. London: Penguin Books.

Snell, Daniel C. 2011. *Religions of the Ancient Near East.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Soden, Wolfram von. 1994. *The Ancient Orient: An Introduction to the Study of the Ancient Near East.* Translated by Donald G. Schley. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans.

Speiser, E.A. 1983. “Ancient Mesopotamia.” In *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Robert C. Denton, 35-76. New Haven, Connecticut: American Oriental Society.

Vansina, Jan. 1985. *Oral Tradition as History*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.

Verbrugge, Gerald P, and John M. Wickersham, eds. 2001. *Berossos and Manetho, Introduced and Translated: Native Traditions in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Ziskind, Jonathan R. 1972. “The Sumerian Problem.” *History Teacher* 5: 34-41.

The Babylonians

Chapter 1: Mesopotamia before Babylon

Ancient Babylon was located in a region known as Mesopotamia, a word that comes from ancient Greek and means “the land between the rivers”, based on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers that essentially mark the boundaries of the territory (Pollack 1999, 1). Babylon is also derived from a Greek word for the city: *Bablin* (Frankfort 1996). In terms of modern nation-states, Mesopotamia is roughly equivalent to most of Iraq and the eastern part of Syria.

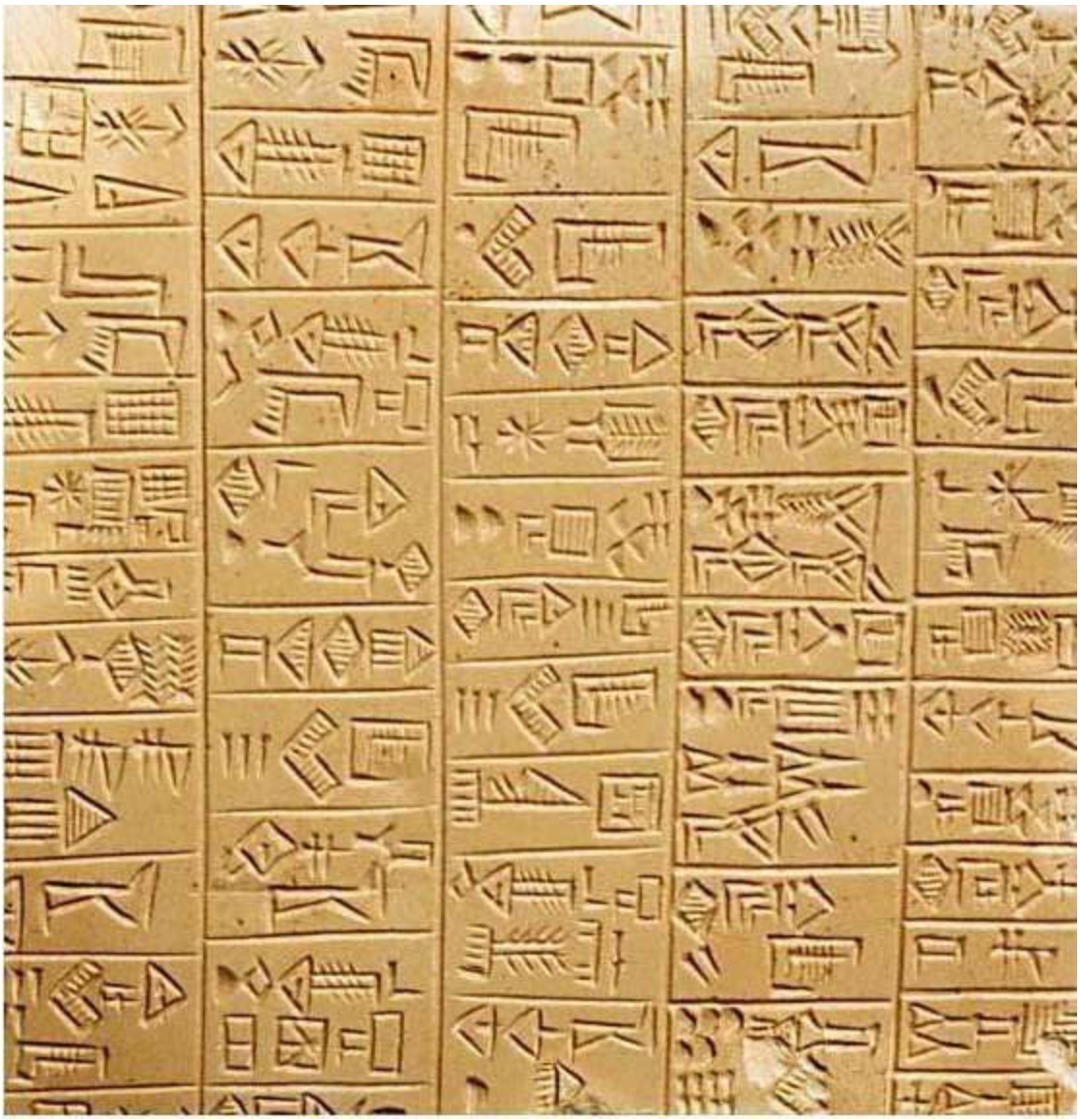
The Tigris and Euphrates rivers and their tributaries produced enormous quantities of alluvial soil, which formed the Mesopotamian Plain and made the region part of the “Fertile Crescent” (Pollack 1999, 29). The annual rainfall levels in this region were only between 100-200 millimeters per year, so early civilizations in Mesopotamia were very dependent on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers for food, water, and travel, and in this respect, Mesopotamia was very similar to ancient Egypt, one of the most important contemporary civilizations. The rich alluvial soil of the Mesopotamian Plain may have been one of the impetuses that propelled civilization in the region, but it also has been the reason why so many records and monuments were destroyed (Kuhrt 2010, 1:108). Thankfully, modern scholars have been able to piece together a fairly accurate history of ancient Babylon based on the few remaining documents discovered in the city, as well as archives from other ancient Mesopotamian cities.

What set Mesopotamia apart from Egypt the most was the variety of different ethnic groups who called the region home. Egypt was comprised of Egyptians, but Mesopotamia was home to Sumerians, Amorites, Kassites, and Assyrians, just to name a few. These different ethnic groups often established dynasties in cities that competed for control of the entire region, and often violently at that (Kuhrt 2010, 1:75). The first ethnic group to rise to prominence in Mesopotamia was the Sumerians. The ethnic origins of the Sumerians remains mysterious, since they were not Semitic like many of the other Mesopotamian peoples, but they were the first people in the region to invent writing, which they did around 3000 BC in the southern Mesopotamian city of Uruk (von Soden 1994, 31). The type of writing that the Sumerians invented became known as “cuneiform”, a system in which

wedge-type characters were etched into tablets that were usually made of clay (van de Mieroop 2007, 28). The cuneiform script would prove to be especially adaptable and enduring, as it was used for thousands of years to write in such divergent languages as Akkadian, Hittite, and Persian (van de Mieroop 2007, 32).

Even after the Sumerians were gone, their language was still used for a while in Babylon in cuneiform inscriptions, but it was eventually replaced by the Semitic language Akkadian (Kuhrt 2010, 1:74). Akkadian was also an Ancient language spoken in the region, but it did not make its way to the writing tablet until a few hundred years after the Sumerians had developed a robust writing system. Being bilingual, the early Mesopotamian scribes were able to appropriate the Sumerian writing system to write the Akkadian language as well, and these two distinct languages gave their names to the two competing political and cultural traditions in this region during the 3rd millennium: Sumer (the Sumerians) and Akkad (the Akkadians).

A map of Ancient Mesopotamia and important locations in the region.



Sumerian cuneiform on a tablet.

By the 2nd millennium the Akkadian culture had become predominant and Sumerian, while still spoken, was already marginalized. At the same time, however, the Akkadian language itself had split into two distinct dialects, with Babylonian speakers in the south and Assyrian speakers in the north, named for their capital Aššur (the character *š* is a phoneme in Sumerian and Akkadian with the sound “sh”).

In addition to these languages, early in the second millennium a third culture appeared on the Mesopotamian landscape: the Amorites. These Amorites spoke a West-Semitic language that is only documented in personal

names. The reason it is relevant to this discussion is that personal names in Mesopotamia contained religious statements of various kinds. One famous example would be the Old Babylonian king and author of the famous law code, Hammurapi [ʿ*ammu-rāpi*ʾ "the paternal uncle (deity) is a healer"], where the alternate spelling Hammurabi comes from the later Akkadian scribal interpretation of his name as [ʿ*ammu-rabi* "the family is large/great"].

Writing was not the only gift that the Sumerians gave to Mesopotamia and Babylon; the religion and architecture of ancient Babylon can also trace its roots to the Sumerians. The Sumerians were the first Mesopotamian people to build ziggurats, which were large, triangle-shaped buildings that formed part of the temple complex (van de Mieroop 2007, 25). Ziggurats were built by every significant group in Mesopotamia from the 3rd millennium BC until the 6th century BC (Kuhrt 2010, 64, 341), and while ziggurats may have superficially resembled Egyptians pyramids in their shape, they differed vastly in their functions – pyramids were tombs while ziggurats were temples – and their composition. Many pyramids, especially the ones in Giza, were made of stone, but the ziggurats of Mesopotamia were made of mud-brick, so unlike the pyramids, few ziggurats remain, and the ones that have are just shells of their former selves (Kuhrt 2010, 341).

As the various Mesopotamian peoples who came after the Sumerians adopted the ziggurat style temples, they also adopted many of the deities of the Sumerian pantheon. They often invented different rituals and interpreted the gods in local, syncretic fashion, but religion was often the common denominator among all the Mesopotamian peoples (Snell 2011, 20). In the early historical periods, cities were closely identified with deities, and divine names were often incorporated as part of the way the city name was written. The cuneiform sign for the city was written below or surrounding the cuneiform sign for the god of that particular city. The city of Larsa was written "city + UTU (the sun god)", the city of Ur was written "city + ŠEŠ (Nanna, the moon god)", and the city Nina was written "city with a fish symbol inside it (Nanše, goddess of divination and dreams)". Further evidence for this close identification between the city and the deity is found in oaths, which were sometimes taken in the name of the city itself as if it were a deity.

When certain cities gained political prominence over smaller villages in their vicinity, they symbolized their affinities with these other villages by establishing mythological family relations among the deities, known as a pantheon. In this manner, multitudes of different local pantheons developed throughout the larger region. Mesopotamians further believed that the power to rule the people was a gift from the gods, but at different periods and in different cities, different gods bestowed this gift. In Larsa, An (the sky god) provided Rim-Sin with the three symbols of kingship: the crown, the throne and the scepter. At Nippur, it was Enlil, Ashimbabbar (a Sumerian name for Sîn, the moon god), and Enki who declared Ur-Nammu king (of Ur). Later, Hammurabi of Babylon indicates in the prologue to his famous law code that the goddess Mama bestowed the scepter and crown upon him (CH iii 24-35).

An inscription of the Code of Hammurabi

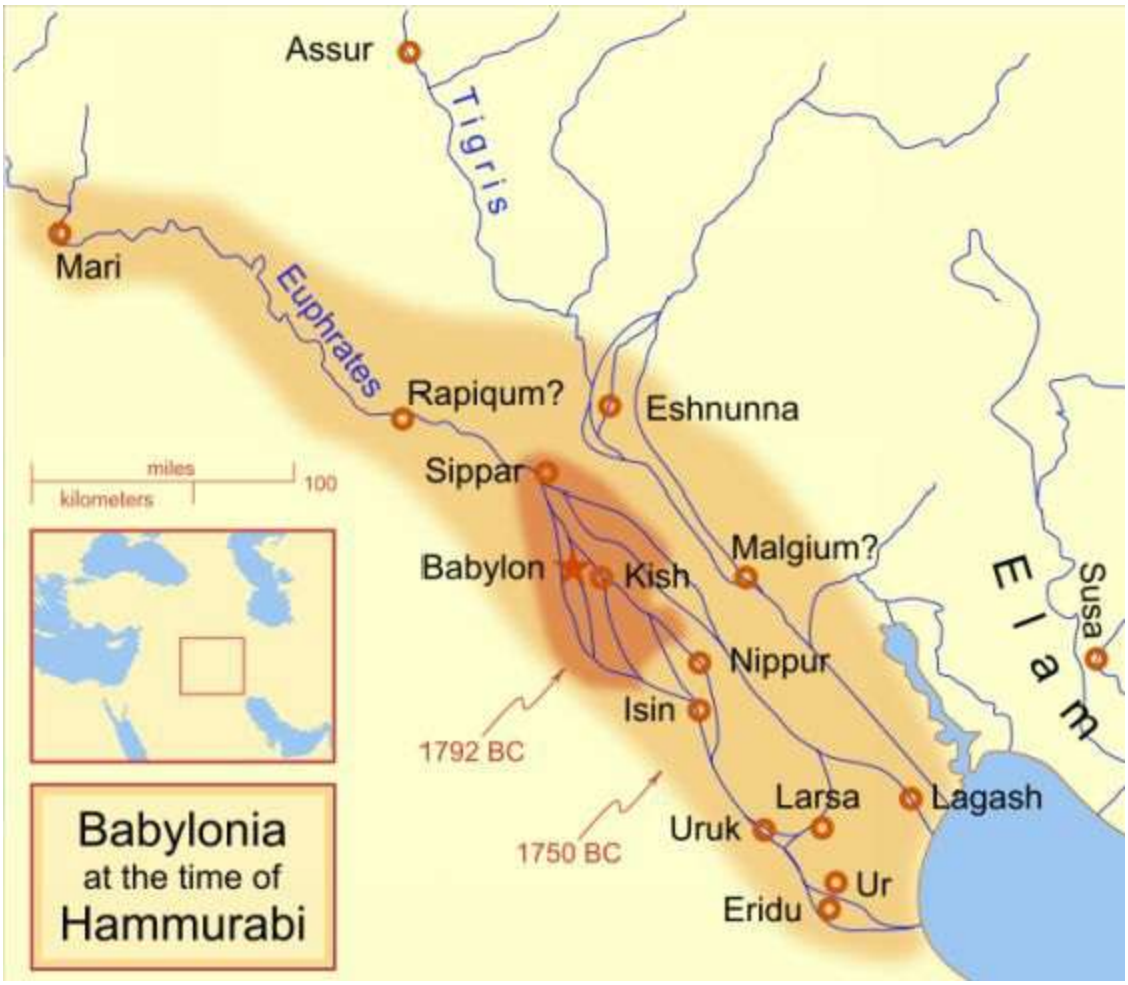
Chapter 2: The First Babylonian Dynasty (circa 1894-1595 BC)

"If a man has accused another of laying a kišpu (spell) upon him, but has not proved it, the accused shall go to the sacred river, he shall plunge into the sacred river, and if the sacred river shall conquer him, he that accused him shall take possession of his house. If the sacred river shall show his innocence and he is saved, his accuser shall be put to death. He that plunged into the sacred river shall appropriate the house of him that accused him." – The Code of Hammurabi

The Sumerians may have established Mesopotamian civilization around the city of Uruk, but after they were gone, Babylon came into its own as the center of power and culture between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. A group of people known as the Amorites established the First Dynasty at Babylon not long after the Sumerians faded from the historical record (Kuhrt 2010, 1:108). For about the first 100 years, Babylon's power was limited to its immediate vicinity, but that changed when the renowned king Hammurabi came to power. Although there is no information on the age of Hammurabi when he took the throne, he ruled Babylon for 43 years from 1792-1750 B.C., when he became gravely ill and handed the throne to one of his sons, Samsu-iluna. Hammurabi spent the first 28 years of his career strengthening the kingdom he inherited and managing construction projects ranging from temples to irrigation canals. He also focused himself on winning the hearts of his people by making a reliable, transparent judicial system. He fought a few local skirmishes on the outskirts of his kingdom that seemed to involve securing his own borders from outside threats more than increasing the size of his own kingdom. During most of that time he ruled in the shadow of his neighbor to the north, Šamši-Adad, the king of Ekallatum (and later Assyria).

The last decade or so of his reign was spent empire building. Hammurabi established powerful alliances and conquered enemies on all sides expanding his kingdom to a monumental empire. He stopped the Elamite incursion from the east, driving them from regions they had taken adjacent to Babylon, and he finally routed Rim-Sîn, his long-time enemy to the south in Larsa. Hammurabi subsequently brought the kingdom of Assyria under his control, and after several years being allied with the powerful northwestern kingdom of Mari, he defeated their army as well and brought Mari under the ultimate

control of Babylon. When all was said and done, Hammurabi handed over to his son a vast empire eight times the size of the kingdom left to him by his own father. It is no wonder that later generations of Babylonians considered the reign of Hammurabi to be the golden age of Babylon, a sentiment still shared by many today.



The map shows the expansion of Hammurabi's empire over the course of his reign

A number of cuneiform tablets from the Mesopotamian city of Mari relate that between 1763 and 1755 BC, Hammurabi was able to conquer most of Mesopotamia (Kuhrt 2010, 1:109). Hammurabi's Babylonian empire was the first true empire in Mesopotamia, and parts of the king's campaigns are recorded graphically in the *Babylonian Chronicle*. *Chronicle* 20 states, "Hammurabi, king of Babylon, mustered his army and marched against Rim-Sin, king of Ur. He captured Ur and Larsa (and) took their property to

Babylon. He brought [Rim-S]in…to Babylon" (Grayson 2000, 155).

Hammurabi (standing), depicted as receiving his royal insignia from Shamash. Hammurabi holds his hands over his mouth as a sign of prayer.

Depiction of Hammurabi

Much like other conquerors that came after him, Hammurabi was free to focus his efforts and attention to domestic affairs after he subdued the other cities of Mesopotamia. Although Hammurabi was a great conqueror, he is perhaps best known for being a law giver. In fact, he's best known today for Hammurabi's Code, one of the earliest known codes of law in human history. Inscribed on stone tablets, Hammurabi's Code was found over 3,500 years later in the early 20th century, making him one of antiquity's most famous men.

The eponymously named code that is attributed to Hammurabi is one of the earliest examples of a codified law, though some scholars argue that the modern designation of it as a code should be eschewed in favor of labeling it a propaganda piece that portrayed the ruler as an ideal king (van de Mieroop 2007, 113). However the overall context of the text is interpreted today, the

mention of certain cities and regions makes it clear that it was written sometime after his 30th regnal year, when those places were under his control (Kuhrt 2010, 111). The Code was clearly written after his conquests, when Hammurabi was able to focus his energies on domestic matters, and the text established ideas of punitive justice that were echoed later in the Old Testament of the Bible.

The Code also placed the city of Babylon and its patron god, Marduk, in an exalted position. The text states: “When lofty Anum, king of the Anunnaki, (and) Enlil, lord of heaven and earth, the determiner of the destinies of the land, determined for Marduk, the first-born of Enki, the Enlil functions over all mankind, made him great among the Igigi, called Babylon by its exalted name, made it supreme in the world, established for him in its midst an enduring kingship, whose foundations are as firm as heaven and earth – at that time Anum and Enlil name me to promote the welfare of the people, me, Hammurabi, the devout, god- fearing prince, to cause justice to prevail in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil, that the strong might not oppress the weak, to rise light the sun over the black haired (people)” (Pritchard 1992, 164).

The code of Hammurabi on a clay tablet

Clearly, Hammurabi saw Babylon not only as the center of his empire but also the center of the world, and he had good reason to think such a thing. A closer examination of Babylonian culture during the First Dynasty of Babylon reveals that great cultural and scientific advances were made that influenced not only later Mesopotamian dynasties but possibly other peoples beyond the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Religion in Babylon during the First Dynasty was similar to that in other parts of Mesopotamia during the period. Babylonians followed a polytheistic religion like most other peoples in the ancient Near East, such as the Egyptians, but unlike the Egyptians, Mesopotamian deities were usually depicted in human form, not anthropomorphic (von Soden 1994, 175). As mentioned above, the various peoples of Mesopotamia worshipped many of the same gods and goddesses, but certain deities were believed to live in particular cities; for the Babylonians, the patron god of their city was

Marduk, who was also associated with the planet known today as Jupiter (von Soden 1994, 180).

The scholarly term for the following of an ancient deity is “cult”, although this should not be confused with the pejorative sense that the word has taken on in the modern world. The cult was simply the people who believed in a particular deity the most and therefore made offerings and pilgrimages to the deity during important festivals, which in Babylon was the New Year festival. Central to the cult of any Mesopotamian deity was the temple, and the holiest place within the temple was the shrine where the statue of the deity – the deity itself in the eyes of the believers – was kept (Frankfort 1978, 302-5). As a result, the cult statues of various deities were often the object of desire during war time and viewed as the greatest booty that could be taken from an enemy. A victorious king would take the cult statue from his enemy and place it in his own capital as a sort of hostage (Cogan 1974, 25). It was within this milieu that Hammurabi created his empire and raised the status not only of Babylon, but also of its god, Marduk (von Soden 1994, 180).

Marduk, the sun god of Babylon, with his thunderbolts pursues Anzu after Anzu stole the Tablets of Destiny.

Numerous texts of both historical and religious natures give a glimpse into

the importance that the Babylonians placed on Marduk. Mesopotamians believed that if their gods were slighted or disrespected in any way, then real-world repercussions could befall the offenders. The *Babylonian Chronicle* recounts an incident that took place before the First Babylonian Dynasty – when Babylon was still politically unimportant – where the king of Agade, Sargon the Great, disrespected Babylon and Marduk after a military victory. The text reads, "Afterwards, Subartu attacked (Sargon) in full force and called him to arms. Sargon set an ambush and completely defeated them. He overpowered their extensive army and sent their possessions into Agade. He dug up the dirt of the pit of Babylon and made a counterpart of Babylon next to Agade. Because of the wrong he had done the great lord Marduk became angry and wiped out his people by famine. They (his subjects) rebelled against him from east to west and he (Marduk) afflicted [him] with insomnia." (Grayson 2000, 153-54).

Besides not angering Marduk by committing any obviously disrespectful acts towards Babylon or his statue, Babylonians were also expected to take part in the important New Year's festival. One of the clearest visual representations of the subservient relationship of the king to the deity occurred during this festival, called the *akītu*, which was celebrated in Babylon for 11 days and served as an annual reminder of the divine legitimization of the king. On the fifth day of the ceremony, the king entered the temple of Marduk, where his attendants stripped him of his symbols of kingship. One of the priests (the URIGALLU) slapped him across the face, pulled his ears and made him bow down to Marduk and swear that he had not sinned and that he had governed justly. The priest returned the symbols of his kingship and slapped him across the face a second time. It was a good omen if he slapped him hard enough to bring tears to his eyes (Roaf, "Cultural Atlas," 201-2).

During the festival, the statue of Marduk would be brought to the other temples in Babylon before being placed back into his shrine for another year. The priests would ask Marduk for his blessing and protection of Babylon: " O Lord, at thy going into the temple [may thy house say to thee, 'Be appeased.'] O Prince, Lord Marduk, at thy going into the temple . . . Do not neglect Babylon, the city of thy rejoicing; 'O Lord, be appeased,' . . . Look favorably on Babylon and Esaglia; 'O Lord, be appeased." (Pritchard

1992, 390).

The god Marduk was clearly of prime importance to the people of Babylon and central to their culture, but inextricably intertwined with Marduk was the Babylonian concept of kingship. Kingship in the ancient Near East was an incredibly important concept since democracy and republican forms of government were yet to be developed, so the power of government essentially rested with the ruling monarch. In Egypt the king was viewed as a god, the living incarnation of the sky-god Horus (Frankfort 1978, 36-46), but in Mesopotamia, kings were seen as representatives of the gods (von Soden 1994, 63). There were cases, such as Naram-Sin king of Akkad (ca. 2254-2218 BC), where a Mesopotamian king claimed divinity (van de Mieroop 2007, 68), but those instances were extremely rare (von Soden 1994, 67). To the Babylonians and their other Mesopotamian neighbors, their kings were burdened with rule by the gods, but they were not actually gods themselves (Frankfort 1978, 237).

Naturally, religion also played a central role in military campaigns. A diviner, known as a *barû* priest, who acted as a general during the Old Babylonian period (ca. 2000-1500 BCE), always accompanied the army in Mesopotamia. Before embarking on a military campaign, the diviner would engage in a ritual that lasted the entire night. He would sacrifice a young ram to Shamash, the sun god, and Adad, the storm god, and then remove its liver (Steinkeller, "Babylonian Extispicy," 38-45). The diviner would take an oil omen, allowing him to sit in the throne of judgment. From there the diviner would then ask a series of "yes" or "no" questions about the campaign as a whole and about individual elements within the campaign. If the result was unfavorable to the king's campaign, or if it the results were uncertain, the diviner would perform the ritual again either to check the results of the original questions, or to ask a new set of questions. After a victorious battle, the conquering army would take spoils and booty from the enemy. Upon their return, kings would offer tokens from these spoils to the temple in gratitude for a successful campaign. They would also perform a cultic cleaning of their weapons after using them (Römer, "Religion," 154).

An ancient Babylonian seal that depicts the king making a sacrifice to Shamash.

The Marduk cult and divinely inspired kingship that provided the basis for much of Babylonian culture also played a major role in the advancement of science and other aspects of learning during the First Babylonian Dynasty and in later periods. In today's modern world, there is a clear line of demarcation between science and religion that is rarely crossed, and scholars of one field often view the other as antithetical to the other's worldview. This was not the case in the ancient Near East, where priests and scientists were one and the same. The same men who designed the pyramids of Egypt also

served in the many temples of that land, and in Mesopotamia ziggurats served as not only temples but also scribal schools and celestial observatories (Frankfort 1996, 20).

What is known today as ancient Mesopotamian/Babylonian science was in fact extremely advanced on the one hand, but at the same time it lacked any theorems, proofs or any abstract reasoning (von Soden 1994, 146). All Babylonian science – math, engineering, astronomy – was done for the benefit of the state; for example, since there was only a finite area of farmable land, complex means of dividing farmland into plots had to be devised that resulted in not only rectangular parcels but also triangular and even polygon parcels (von Soden 1994, 165).

The Babylonians also used advanced math to produce siege weapon tactics that were far ahead of the time. Evidence from the First Babylonian Dynasty demonstrates that students were schooled in calculations designed to take down walled cities by such means as diverting rivers to run through cities (von Soden 1994, 85). The advanced siege warfare and weaponry that the Babylonians first invented during the First Babylonian Dynasty was then perfected by their northern neighbors, the Assyrians, nearly 1,000 years later. One particular relief from the city of Nimrud dated to the late 8th century BC depicts the Assyrian army using ladders and a wheeled siege-engine to take a city (Curtis and Reade 1995, 60-61).

Modern scholars know quite a bit about Babylonian mathematics because many of their calculating methods and multiplication tables have been preserved on clay tablets (Stolper 1993, 276-78). The evidence shows that they used a sexagesimal system of counting (based on 60) and were the first people to use fractions (von Soden 1994, 166), a counting system that was good enough to produce advanced siege weaponry and also advanced geometry. In fact, Babylonian geometry was advanced enough that they used the Pythagorean Theorem in practice before it was named as such, but they did not question their math or geometry the way Pythagoras and the Greeks later would (von Soden 1994, 167-68).

The Babylonians developed math and engineering that was ahead of it time, but the type of science they were best known for, and most misunderstood today, was astrology and astronomy. Although the practice of astrology –

divining the future based on the movement of celestial bodies – originated in Babylon, its concept has changed throughout the millennia. The ancient Babylonians consulted the stars for the affairs of the state, such as when to plant crops or go to war, but they did not practice astrology on behalf of individuals (Sachs 1952). Astrology for personal purposes was first done when the Greek Seleucids ruled Mesopotamia and is therefore a Greek misinterpretation of a Babylonian practice (von Soden 1994, 157). The ancient Babylonians would have thought it preposterous to use astrology and horoscopes the way many do in the modern world, but that does not mean people should discount Babylonian astrology as unscientific. In fact, Babylonian astrological predictions were based on scientific observations of the universe that were unmatched for centuries and later used by other ancient peoples, and by the end of the 2nd millennium BC, Babylonian scientists had identified a large number of constellations, which they divided into three circles of the gods Anu, Ellil, and Ea (von Soden 1994, 169). By the 1st millennium BC, they more carefully observed the solar system, which included planets such as Jupiter (Marduk), from temples that served as observatories. Babylonian observations of the universe were so accurate that later Greek scientists like Ptolemy and Thales were able to predict eclipses based on their observations (von Soden 1994, 170). Babylonian astronomical observations also led to advances in calendric calculations (von Soden 1994, 171).

The greatness of Babylonian culture and science shined for several centuries and actually outlived the dynasty that gave birth to so much of it. As Babylon's culture grew, its political influence began to wane., and shortly after Hammurabi's death, a rival dynasty in southern Mesopotamia appeared. The new dynasty controlled the coastline of the Persian Gulf, which obstructed Babylon's trade links with copper rich Arabia and the more remote Indus Valley region (Kuhrt 2010, 1:232). Babylon remained one of the most important cities in Mesopotamia for over 100 years after Hammurabi's death, but its influence gradually declined (Kuhrt 2010, 1:116).

The final blow to the First Babylonian Dynasty came when king Mursilis I of the Hittite empire sacked Babylon around 1595 BC (Macqueen 1986, 44). Although Mursilis and the Hittite army did not occupy Babylon, they added one final insult to the defunct Babylonian dynasty by taking the statue of

Marduk and giving it to one of their Mesopotamian allies (Macqueen 1986, 44).

Chapter 3: Babylon in the Late Second Millennium

After the fall of the First Dynasty, Babylon entered into a 200 year period during which the power in Mesopotamia shifted to the north with the Assyrians, but despite this setback, Babylon would again become the city *par excellence* of Mesopotamia when a new ethnic group called the Kassites moved into Babylon and replaced the Amorites as rulers of the city and southern Mesopotamia. Before the Kassites were the ruling dynasty of Babylon, they served the city as agricultural laborers and mercenaries, but they would prove more than capable in the world of Mesopotamian politics by ruling the city for over 200 years (1374-1159 BC) (Kuhrt 2010, 1:333).

Although the Kassites began as outsiders, they embarked on a program to make themselves appear as legitimate Babylonian rulers by embracing the gods of the city, especially Marduk, whose statue they returned to its shrine during the reign of Agum II (Kuhrt 2010, 1:338). The Kassite kings also refrained from using their own language in official inscriptions and instead used the traditional Babylonian languages of Sumerian and Akkadian (Kuhrt 1:339). In fact, during the Kassite dynasty, Babylon became a global city, and Akkadian attained the status of a *lingua franca* language throughout the Near East.

Before the Kassite dynasty, Babylon had contact with its other powerful Mesopotamian neighbors and the Hittite empire to the north in Anatolia to some extent, but there was no direct contact with Egypt. The period of the Kassite dynasty coincided with Egypt's New Kingdom (ca. 1539-1075 BC), when the two great powers were expanding their borders and eventually made direct contact with each other. The first direct contact between Egypt and Babylon took place when the Egyptian king Thutmose III (ca. 1504-1450), led an expedition into the Levant that ended on the shores of the Euphrates River (Kuhrt 2010, 1:339). Thutmose III erected a stela that commemorated the event by stating: "Year 23, first month of summer, day 16, (arrival) at the town of Yehem, [His majesty] ordered a consultation with his valiant army saying: 'That wretched foe of Kadesh has come and entered into Megiddo and is [there] at this moment. He has gathered to him the princes of [all] the foreign lands [that had been loyal] to Egypt, as well as those from as far as Nahrin'". (Lichtheim, 1976 30).

The Egyptian king did not know it at the time, but by bringing his army to the Euphrates River, he would help usher in the first period of complex geopolitics in the world and an era of relative peace in the Near East. After the Egyptians made contact with the Babylonians, the two of them and the Assyrians, Hittites, and Alashia (Cyprus) all established a coalition of great powers in the region that made trade agreements with each other and established the limits of their empires by diplomatic means (Kuhrt 2010, 1:339). Modern scholars know about Babylon's involvement in the "Great Powers Club" through a large number of Akkadian cuneiform tablets discovered in ruins of the ancient Egyptian city of Amarna in 1887 (Cochavi-Rainey 1999, 1). The discovery of these tablets, known today as the "Amarna Letters," revealed that Akkadian was the language of diplomacy at the time, and that cuneiform was the style of writing used in official correspondence between leaders. The letters also revealed that the geopolitical situation in the ancient Near East was much more complicated than many believed. Rare commodities, and sometimes royal princesses, were exchanged between the kings, and the members also addressed one another as "brother" as a sign of respect. For example, a letter sent by the Egyptian king Amenhotep III relates how he sent three common items in Egypt – ebony, ivory, silver and gold – which were rare in Mesopotamia, as gifts to Kadash-Enlil I king of Babylon (ca. 1374-1360). The text states: "I herewith send you, in the charge of Shutti, a greeting-gift of things for the new house: 1 bed of ebony, overlaid with ivory and gold; 3 beds of ebony, overlaid with god; 1 headrest of ebony, overlaid with gold; 1 lar[ge] chair [o]f ebony, overlaid with gold; 5 chairs of [eb]ony, overlaid with gold; 4 chairs of ebo[ny], overlaid with gold. These things, the weight of all the old: 7 minas, 9 shekels, of gold. The weight of the silver: 1 [mi]na, 8 ½ shekels, of silver. (In addition), 10 footrests of ebony; [. . .] of ebony, overlaid with gold; [. . .] footrests of ivory, overlaid with gold; [. . .] . . . of gold. [Total x] minas, 10 and 7 shekels, of gold". (Cochavi-Rainey 1999, 167). The relationship and gifting between the kings in the Great Powers club was reciprocal, and each king was expected to send rare items in return.

Thanks to the location of the city, the Babylonians controlled trade routes that linked Mesopotamia to the Iranian plateau, which is the only place in the world where lapis-lazuli can be found (Kuhrt 2010, 340-41). The Egyptians

found lapis-lazuli especially attractive and used it to create some of their best works of art in the New Kingdom, most notably the blue color in king Tutankhamen's gold mummy mask (Edwards 1972, 50). In one letter from the Babylonian king Buranburiash II (ca. 1359-1333) to the Egyptian king Akhenaten, it is revealed that lapis-lazuli was sent in Egypt in part to impress a royal princess. The letter states, "I send as your greeting-gift 2 minas of lapis lazuli, and concerning your daughter Mayati having heard (about her), I send to her as her greeting-gift a necklace of cricket-(shaped) gems, of lapis lazuli, 1048 their number." (Cochavi-Rainey 1999, 169).

King Tut's funerary mask.

Burnaburiash's advance towards one of Akhenaten's daughters demonstrates another important commodity that some of the Great Powers were willing to trade: royal princesses. Even back in antiquity, royal marriages were often a tool or weapon in the arsenals of monarchs who wished to maintain or increase their power. A marriage alliance with a strong kingdom could mean life or death to a dynasty, so royal sons and daughters were often given away based on political considerations. The kings of the Great Powers club were no different in this respect, and one item list from Amarna shows that Akhenaten sent several items, including gold and copper, after Burnaburiash gave one of this daughter's to the Egyptian king: "[These items Napkhuru]ra, great king, [king of Egypt, [s]ent [to his brother, Burna]burariash [great king, king of Karaduniash (Babylon)] [when he (Burnaburiash) gave his daughter to] him." (Cochavi-Rainey 1999, 9).

The most interesting aspect of these exchanges of royal princesses is that they were the one commodity the Egyptians did not reciprocate. When the Egyptian king Amenhotep III took one of the Babylonian king Kurigaluz I's daughters in the early 14th century BC as a royal wife, it helped cement peace between the two kingdoms, but there are no extant records that indicate Egyptian kings gave their own daughters in marriage to foreign kings (Kuhrt 2010, 1:342). It is unclear whether Burnaburiash knew his overtures to Akhenaten's daughter were in vain, but one could guess that he did not because there is no known letter of protest about the subject sent to the Egyptian king.

The system that the Great Powers of the ancient Near East practiced was truly remarkable when one considers its scope and length of time. The kings were able to avoid total war through diplomacy, a feat rarely duplicated until modern times and the threat of mutually assured nuclear annihilation. Even other later great powers like the Romans were never able to peaceably coexist with comparable kingdoms as long as the Great Powers did.

All good things must end, including the period of the Great Powers. Although the Kassites were originally foreign to Babylon, they proved to be more than capable of fostering and promoting the culture that the Amorites established in the First Dynasty of Babylon. In the realm of diplomacy and geopolitics, the Kassite dynasty was actually far ahead of its predecessor, but

a couple of different factors led to its collapse and the temporary fading of Babylonian importance in Mesopotamia once more. In the 12th century BC, the ancient Near East system was devastated by a series of raids by a disparate group of peoples known collectively as the “Sea Peoples.” The origins of these peoples are not known for sure, but modern scholars believe that many of them were Indo-European in origin and possibly came from the western Mediterranean region (Sandars 1987, 97). One of the problems concerning the identification of these peoples is that they were not one single homogenous group but groups of various sizes and from different locations who apparently worked together at least occasionally in loose confederations (Sandar 1987, 85-103). The other problem stems from the fact that there is a dearth of textual evidence concerning them; the Sea Peoples were not literate and the only literate society to write about them were the Egyptians, which is where the modern name is derived (Sandars 1987, 9).

What is known about the Sea Peoples is that they wrought several waves of destruction that ultimately contributed directly to the collapse of the Hittite Empire (Macqueen 1986, 154), several city-states in the Levant (Haywood 2005, 41), and very nearly the Egyptian kingdom (Sandars 1987, 105-137). Archaeological and textual sources demonstrate that the Sea Peoples used battlefield weapons and techniques that made those of the Bronze Age – such as chariots and khepish swords – obsolete, and any army that used those archaic tactics was doomed to failure (Drews 1993). Ultimately, the Sea Peoples’ invasions and migrations had the effect of destroying the Great Powers system of the Near East and bringing the Bronze Age to an end.

Although Babylon was far removed from the Mediterranean Sea and the chaos inflicted on that region by the Sea Peoples, it did not escape the system’s collapse. While the Sea Peoples were ravaging the Mediterranean coastline, Semitic peoples such as the Hebrews, Aramaeans, and Chaldeans migrated across the Syrian and Arabian deserts towards Mesopotamia (Haywood 2005, 41). The Aramaeans proved to be especially harmful to Babylon, as they invoked heavy damage on the city and region (Kuhrt 2010, 1:379). The Kassite dynasty was further destabilized by wars between its northern neighbor, Assyria, and its western neighbor, Elam, because they used the region around Babylon as their battlefield (Kuhrt 2010, 1:375).

After the Kassite dynasty fell, two other dynasties briefly ruled from Babylon – the Second Isin and the Sealand – but both proved to be ephemeral (van de Mieroop 2007, 211). After the smoke from the invasions and migrations cleared around the beginning of the 10th century BC, the power in Mesopotamia shifted to the north, and Babylon was again relegated to being a backwater.

Chapter 4: Nebuchadnezzar II and the Neo-Babylonian Dynasty

From about the beginning of the 10th century until the late 7th century BC, the power in the ancient Near East shifted to the cities of Assur, Nineveh, and Khorasbad and away from Babylon. The other cities were all home to the Assyrian empire, which at one point encapsulated all of Mesopotamia, the Levant, and Egypt. Due to their influence, most of the sources from this period concerning Babylon are Assyrian in origin (van de Mieroop 2007, 211).

During this time, Babylon was victim to numerous attacks and invasions and was directly under Assyrian rule from 705-627 BC (Kuhrt 2010, 2:582-84). Although the Assyrians practiced virtually the same religion as the Babylonians, the once central city of Mesopotamia suffered greatly under their rule. The Assyrian king Sennacherib (704-681 BC) was particularly cruel towards Babylon, as he let the once great temples fall into ruin and even removed the precious statue of Marduk to Assyria (Kuhrt 2010, 2:585). The Assyrians relegated Babylon to a lowly position that it had not suffered since the Hittite king Mursilis I sacked the city and took the Marduk statue, but once again, Babylon would rise with a resurgent new dynasty.

The new Babylonian dynasty was started by a man named Nabopolassar (626-605 BC), who liberated the city from Assyrian rule and established what is known by modern scholars as the Neo-Babylonian dynasty (Kuhrt 2010, 2:573). Like the previous great dynasties of Babylon, the Neo-Babylonian dynasty was created by a group of outsiders who would prove to be just as Babylonian as their predecessors. The ethnic origins of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty are traced to a Semitic group, the Chaldeans, who settled in the region south of Babylon after their migrations in the early 1st millennium BC (Kuhrt 2010, 2:275). Like the Amorites and Kassites before them, the Chaldeans brought a new vitality to Babylon that would make the city great once more, but also infamous in the pages of the Old Testament. The Neo-Babylonian dynasty assumed the role of villain in the book of Daniel and the city itself in the book of Revelation, particularly under the rule of the second king of the dynasty, Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BC), but a closer examination reveals that under his rule Babylon flourished culturally once again and attained unprecedented political power.

An engraving on an eye stone of onyx with an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II.

Alongside Hammurabi, Nebuchadnezzar II is remembered as one of Ancient Babylon's most influential kings. Nearly 1,000 years after his famous predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar oversaw the expansion of the Neo-Babylonian Empire during the 7th and 6th centuries B.C., which placed him in conflict with Egypt and the ancient kingdom of Judah. His ruthless conquest of Judah resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and the entire kingdom, and it ultimately earned him notoriety in the Old Testament, where he is mentioned in the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

While Nebuchadnezzar's name lives on mostly due to the Bible and his association with the Hanging Gardens, behind it all was a man documented by the Babylonians and his contemporaries as a competent and successful king. While his success was unfortunate for his enemies, and there are questions surrounding his association with the Hanging Gardens, there is no question that Nebuchadnezzar greatly reformed the ancient city of Babylon and maintained its supremacy throughout Mesopotamia and the Middle East during his time. Plenty of uncertainty about Nebuchadnezzar's life remains, but there is no question he was a great military commander and a competent administrator who managed to hold together his burgeoning empire for nearly half a century.

Upon becoming king, Nebuchadnezzar quickly went about building a royal palace for himself from the ground up. Although his father had also built a

new palace, the new king justified his own by noting that unlike previous kings of Babylon, who built palaces in whatever other city they wished, Babylon was the only city in which he claimed a royal residence. The upper walls of his palace were decorated with blue enameled brickwork, and the cedar doors were adorned with ivory, bronze, silver and gold. The cedar that Nebuchadnezzar had extracted from Lebanon was used for the roof beams, some of which he covered in gold.

Once he was king, Nebuchadnezzar quickly returned to the region of Ḫatti (Syria/Lebanon) for a period of six months, where he did something the Babylonians called "marching about victoriously (or unopposed)", a technical phrase used for military peacekeeping operations in areas that have already been subjugated. During this period, he required all the rulers of this region to come to him and bring their tribute, and according to Josephus, the accompanying oath of fealty that these rulers had to take was that they would "surely keep the country for him, and attempt no uprising nor show friendliness to the Egyptians."

Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon with the massive amounts of tribute that he had received from the region just in time to celebrate the Babylonian New Year's festival, the *akītu*. This festival was so important for Nebuchadnezzar that at some point during his reign he rebuilt the street of Babylon, called the Ai-ibur-šabû, raising it as a boulevard for the procession of Marduk during this festival. Saddam Hussein had it refurbished and it is still an impressive sight today.

A view of Procession Street

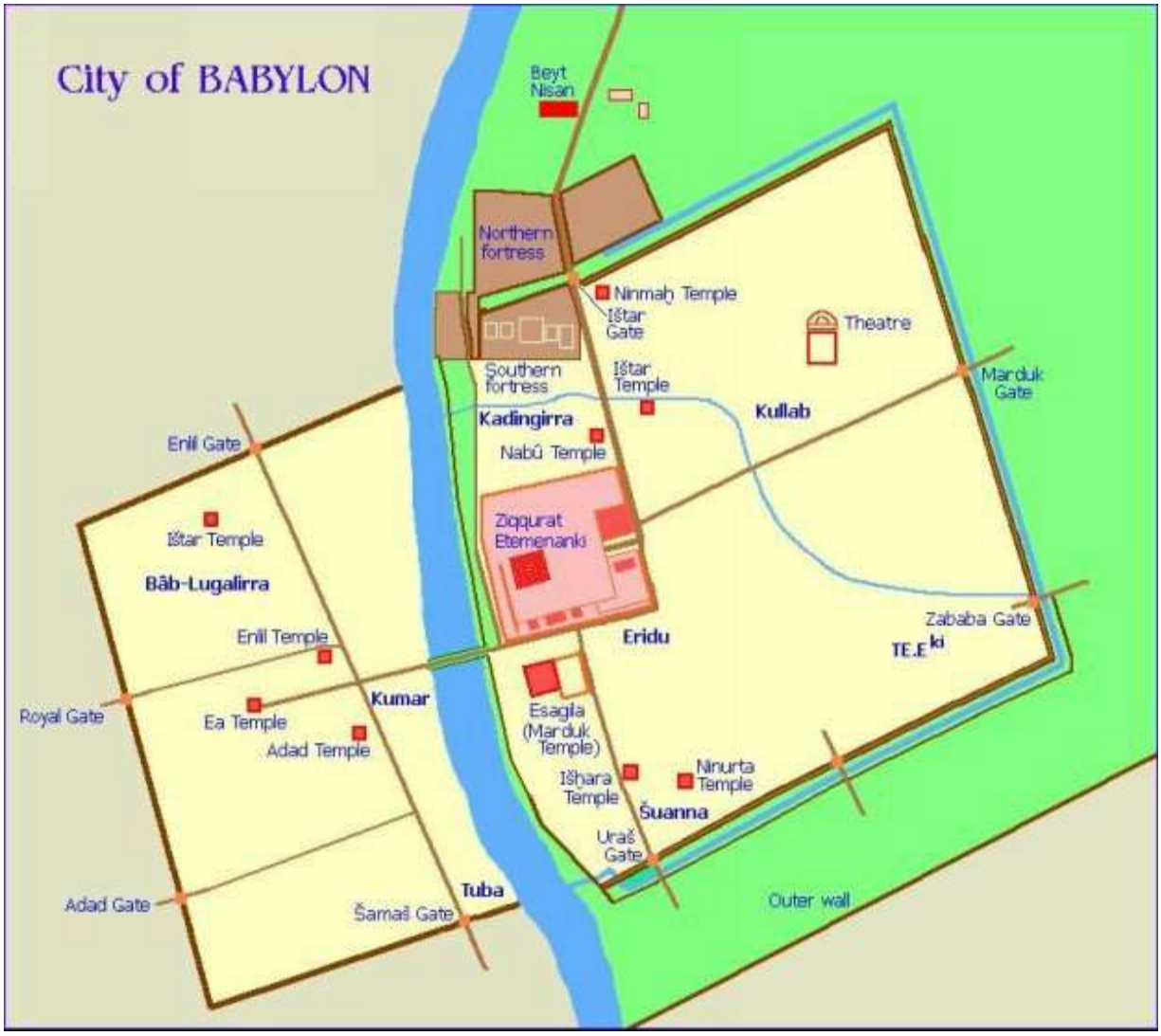
While Nebuchadnezzar had to deal with his enemies, he apparently had to worry about domestic problems as well, including his own brother Nabû-šumu-lišir? In the Babylonian Chronicle, which is the primary cuneiform source of information for Nebuchadnezzar's reign, there is a tantalizing mention of Nabû-šumu-lišir in the third year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, which also coincides with a significant change in military strategy. Up to this point, both Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar would generally leave Babylon for the fighting season in the second to the fourth month of the year and spend six to eight months away from Babylon on the battlefield. However, after the third year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, he always waited until the eighth to the tenth month of the year to leave Babylon and would only engage, even in his most important military campaigns, for a period of one to three months at a time. It is still only conjecture, but several scholars have argued that the king's brother, Nabû-šumu-lišir, mounted a rebellion

against Nebuchadnezzar in the third year of his reign, which is why he is mentioned in the broken context of the Babylonian Chronicle at this point and why the king could no longer engage in extended military campaigns that took him away from Babylon. It seems that for the next 10 years or so, Nebuchadnezzar would become engaged in a game of political whack-a-mole, trying to squelch uprisings and rebellions within the borders of his empire and even his own city itself.

In addition to securing his domains, Nebuchadnezzar had important changes to make to Babylon. When the Babylonian king wasn't destroying the temples of other city-states, he was rebuilding and restoring his own. One of the most common ways that Babylonian kings endeared themselves to their subjects was by restoring a popular temple, and Nebuchadnezzar was no exception. He uses the title in his inscriptions, "restorer of Esagila and Ezida." Esagila was the name of the temple dedicated to Marduk in Babylon, and the Ezida was the temple of Nabû in Borsippa. In 1995, a cuneiform-inscribed clay barrel-cylinder was loaned to the Yale Babylonian Collection, and this barrel-cylinder commemorates Nebuchadnezzar's restoration of the temple Emaḫ for the goddess Ninmaḫ. He reinforced this temple with brickwork and filled the *kisû*-wall with clean earth. Nebuchadnezzar also restored the temple of Adad in Kumar. In total, Nebuchadnezzar took credit for architectural improvements to no less than 16 temples in the city of Babylon itself, with work on an additional 12 in other cities surrounding the capital.

Other projects relied on irrigational engineering projects, and Nebuchadnezzar engaged in them throughout the city of Babylon. The alluvial plain climate of Mesopotamia required kings to keep a close eye on the rivers and waterways that had a tendency to shift during flood season. The Euphrates River, for instance, had a continual tendency to drift eastwards during the flood season, so to combat this tendency, Nebuchadnezzar extended both the quay-walls and the canals that ran throughout the city. These canals made it possible to ship goods from upstream to various key docks within the city, and the docks included stairways that allowed the dockhands to unload the cargo from the barges both at high tide and low tide. Nabopolassar had initiated these waterways, but Nebuchadnezzar expanded and reinforced them.

Nebuchadnezzar also refurbished the main canal, the Libil-hegalla, which provided fresh water and drainage for Babylon. It had been blocked with dust and silt after Sennacherib had gotten to it. Ever the military strategist, he came up with the idea of installing iron grills to prevent soldiers or spies from using this canal or others as a discreet entry into the city. Raising this canal then required him to further raise Procession Street, because the one flowed under the other.



The layout of the city of Babylon

Nebuchadnezzar's finest achievement was the Western Outwork, which diverted the Euphrates to the west and changed the shape of the city entirely.

The problem was that the river was notorious for eroding its bank by the palace and the temple of Marduk, the Esagila. By creating this Western Outwork, he both solved this problem while at the same time providing a type of moat protection for his private residence.

Unfortunately, nearly all of the great monuments built during Nebuchadnezzar II's reign have been lost to the ages, but one of the greatest monuments built during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's reign was a ziggurat in central Babylon. The physical focus of Nebuchadnezzar's new Babylon was the ziggurat named Etemenanki (House of the frontier between heaven and earth) (Kuhrt 2010, 2:593). The ziggurat stood just south of the king's palace and was part of a greater temple complex that housed the all-important statue of Marduk (Frankfort 1996, 203). Scholars believe that the Etemenanki ziggurat influenced ancient Jewish scholars who were living as prisoners in Babylon at the time, and that they depicted it as the famed "Tower of Babel" in the book of Genesis of the Old Testament (Frankfort 1996, 203). Genesis states, "And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, 'Go to let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly.' And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, 'Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.' . . . Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did confound the language of all the earth; and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth (Gen. 11:1-9).

The Biblical account of the Tower of Babel relates a few interesting and important facts about the history of Babylon. Sippar is what the Hebrews called Babylonia, and although the events may be anachronistic by incorporating historical aspects and events from different periods, most of the facts are accurate. The burning of brick described in the building of the monument was the exact same method used to make Mesopotamian ziggurats (Kitchen 2003, 426), and the idea of all people speaking one language is also not so unbelievable considering the period of the Great Powers of the Near East, when all of the great kings of that period wrote in the Akkadian language. The idea of a golden age of peace may also hearken back to the

Great Powers, or possibly to a period even earlier (Kitchen 2003, 426). One final fact that the Biblical account of the Tower of Babel/Etemananki ziggurat brings to light is the accuracy of the Old Testament as a historical text in constructing the chronology of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty. The Old Testament has proven to be a very useful tool in understanding the Neo-Babylonian dynasty by modern scholars (Kuhrt 2010, 2:574).

In 440 BC, Herodotus wrote a description of Babylon that might also have referenced this famous ziggurat: “Babylon's outer wall is the main defence of the city. There is, however, a second inner wall, of less thickness than the first, but very little inferior to it in strength. The center of each division of the town was occupied by a fortress. In the one stood the palace of the kings, surrounded by a wall of great strength and size: in the other was the sacred precinct of Jupiter Belus, a square enclosure two furlongs each way, with gates of solid brass; which was also remaining in my time. In the middle of the precinct there was a tower of solid masonry, a furlong in length and breadth, upon which was raised a second tower, and on that a third, and so on up to eight. The ascent to the top is on the outside, by a path which winds round all the towers. When one is about half-way up, one finds a resting-place and seats, where persons can sit for some time on their way to the summit. On the topmost tower there is a spacious temple, and inside the temple stands a couch of unusual size, richly adorned, with a golden table by its side. There is no statue of any kind set up in the place, nor is the chamber occupied of nights by any one but a single native woman, who, as the Chaldeans, the priests of this god, affirm, is chosen for himself by the deity out of all the women of the land.”

The Entemananki ziggurat may have captured the imagination of ancient Jewish writers, but part of it is one of the only monuments from the Neo-Babylonian dynasty to survive and still amazes people. The one major monument to survive from all the centuries of Babylon’s glory is what is known today as the Ishtar Gate. Named for the Mesopotamian goddess, enough of the gate was recovered and reconstructed by modern archaeologists that it now sits in the Berlin Museum in public view (Frankfort 1996, 204).

The Ishtar Gate served as the entry to the royal palace and temple complex

on the processional way (Frankfort 1996, 203). The Gate is made of blue glazed bricks and contains reliefs of various bulls and dragons, which were sacred to Marduk (Frankfort 1996, 205). The raised relief figures and the bright blue coloring make the Ishtar Gate an incredible sight and demonstrate a workmanship that was of the highest quality.

1932 picture of the ruins of the Gate.

The replica of the Gate in Berlin

An inscription near the Gate that credits Nebuchadnezzar II.

Nebuchadnezzar II's Babylonian building program demonstrates that he clearly wished to recapture the glorious culture of Babylon's past, but his aggressive foreign policy is what propelled the city to previously unattained power. During his rule, Nebuchadnezzar II expanded the boundaries of Babylon's territory to roughly encompass the Assyrian empire, which was much larger than any territory Babylon ever controlled, even during the period of the Great Powers (Kuhrt 2010, 2:575). Chronicle Five from the *Babylonian Chronicle* states how he marched the Babylonian army north and conquered lands in the Levant and Anatolia. The Chronicle states: "The first

year of Nebuchadnezzar (II): In the month Sivan he mustered his army and marched to Hattu. Until the moth Kislev he marched about victoriously in Hattu. All the kings of Hattu came into his presence and he received their vast tribute. He marched to Ashkelon and in the month Kislev he captured it, seized its king, plundered and sacked it. He turned the city into a ruin heap. In the month Shebat he marched away and returned to Babylon." (Grayson 2000, 100).

Nebuchadnezzar II's military campaigns early in his reign were not just intended to reduce cities to "ruin heaps" but ideally to open up new trade routes in order to embellish the monuments of Babylon. An inscription from Wadi-Brisa details how one of the results of Nebuchadnezzar II's Levant campaign was to secure more wood for Marduk, presumably for the temple and Entemenanki ziggurat. The inscription says, "(Trusting) in the power of my lords Nebo and Marduk, I organized [my army] for a[n expedition] to the Lebanon. I made that country happy by eradicating its enemy everywhere. All its scattered inhabitants I led back to their settlements. What no former kind had done (I achieved): I cut through steep mountains, I split rocks, opened passages and (thus) I constructed a straight road for the (transport of the) cedars. I made the Arahtu flo[at] (down) and carry to Marduk, my king, mighty cedars, high and strong, of precious beauty and of excellent dark quality, the abundant yield of the Lebanon, as (if they be) reed stalks (carried by) the river." (Pritchard 1992, 307).

Nebuchadnezzar II's active expansion of the Neo-Babylonian Empire was challenged by the city's former ally, Egypt, and the biblical kingdom of Judah. In fact, Babylon's expansion into the Levant region was actively challenged by the second king of Egypt's Twenty Sixth Dynasty, Nekau II (610-595 BC), who also wished to revamp his country's lost empire (Redford and Freedy 1970, 475). Nekau II and the Egyptians became ally to the small kingdom of Judah, located on the border of Mesopotamia, which in turn prompted Nebuchadnezzar II to lead a campaign to Egypt and possibly briefly into the Nile Valley in 601 BC (Kuhrt 2010, 2:591). Although Nebuchadnezzar II was never able to occupy Egypt as the Assyrian kings Esarhaddon (680-669 BC) and Assurbanipal (669-635 BC) had, his efforts were enough to keep the Egyptians out of the Levant after 587 BC when he defeated the Egyptian king Apries (589-570 BC) (Kuhrt 2010, 2:593).

Egypt's withdrawal from the Levant left the Neo-Babylonians in sole control of the Near East and set the stage for two epic sieges that have become infamous through the Old Testament. Nebuchadnezzar II was able to invoke his will over the entire Levant with the Egyptians out of the way and quickly made the king of Judah, Jehoiakiam, his vassal, which lasted until 602/601 BC (Kitchen 2003, 44). It was at that point that Judah attempted to throw off the yoke of Babylonian rule and regain its independence.

From this point, the book II Kings of the Old Testament, along with some Babylonian inscriptions, give a graphic description of what took place. In 597 BC, Jehoiakiam died, so his son, Jehoachin, became king of Judah at the age of 18 (Kitchen 2003, 44). Nebuchadnezzar II possibly saw his chance to strike a significant blow to Judah, which had become a thorn in Babylon's side, when the young and inexperienced king took the throne. II Kings states:

> "At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem and the city was besieged. And Nebuchadnezar king of Babylon came up against the city, and his servants did besiege it. And Jehoachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign. And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord, as the Lord had said. And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land. And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land, those carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon…
>
> At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem and the city was besieged. And Nebuchadnezar king of Babylon came up against the city, and his servants did besiege it. And Jehoachin the king of Judah went out

> to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign. And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord, as the Lord had said. And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land. And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land, those carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon (2 Kings 24:10-15).

A Babylonian tablet corroborates the biblical account of the sack of Jerusalem in 598 and adds further that the Babylonians installed their own king in Judah: "Year seven, month Kislimu: The king of Akkad moved his army into Hatti land, laid siege to the city of Judah and the king took the city on the second day of the month Addaru. He appointed in it a (new) king of his liking, took heavy booty from it and brought it into Babylon." (Pritchard 1992, 564). Jehoiachin, who had only reigned in Jerusalem for three months before it was overrun by the Babylonian army, would pay for his father's actions; he was carried off captive to Babylon along with his family and 10,000 soldiers, mechanics and ruling elites in the city, including the Judean prophet Ezekiel. This was the second of three deportations the Judeans would face at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.

In addition to carrying off people, Nebuchadnezzar helped himself to some of the vessels in the Jewish temple, bringing them to Babylon and dedicating them to Marduk. As part of his efforts to keep the region under his control, Nebuchadnezzar then installed a king of his own. The Babylonian king appointed Mattaniah, Jehoiakim's brother, as a puppet, and Mattaniah took the throne name Zedekiah.

Although Zedekiah may have been installed as a puppet king by the Neo-Babylonians, it did not stop him from the following the path of his predecessors by rebelling against Babylon. In 586 BC, Zedekiah's rebellion

against Nebuchadnezzar II and Babylon resulted in the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the deportation of most of Judah's population (Kitchen 2003, 45). II Kings describes the scene in detail:

> "And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against round about. And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedkiah. And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden: (now the Chaldeans were against the city round about:) and the king went the way toward the plain. And the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him. So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgement upon him. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon. And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzardan, a captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem. And he burnt the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire. And all the army of the Chaldeans, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round bout. Now the rest of the people that were left in the city, and the fugitives that fell away to the king of Babylon, with the remnant of the multitude did Nebuzardan the captain of the guard carry away." (2 Kings 25:1-11).

The utter destruction wrought by Nebuchadnezzar II earned him and the Neo-Babylonians the status of villain in the Bible, but their actions were a standard practice of warfare in the ancient Near East. During the reign of the Assyrian king Assurnasirpal II (884-859 BC), it became a standard policy to

forcibly resettle rebellious populations within an empire (von Soden 1994, 56). The Assyrian kings Shalmaneser V (726-722 BC) and Sargon II (721-705 BC) had previously captured and destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel/Samaria in 722 BC and then forcibly resettled the surviving population to parts unknown (Kitchen 2003, 40). When viewed from this perspective, Nebuchadnezzar II and the Neo-Babylonians were merely carrying on a standard Mesopotamian military/social strategy that worked in the past.

As soon as Nebuchadnezzar turned his attention toward domestic politics, another foreign king would set his eyes on freedom and political independence. A group of hill people to the east rose up in Nebuchadnezzar's ninth year (595 BC) to challenge him, but after being faced with the overwhelming might of the entire Babylonian army encamped on the shores of the Tigris River only a day's march away, the enemy king turned tail and ran home.

Similarly, Nebuchadnezzar's 10th year on the throne was met by a rebellion of the leading officials within Babylon itself, but it took Nebuchadnezzar only a month to quell the rebellion and capture its leader personally. Archaeologists discovered the records of the trial and sentencing of one of the officials involved in this rebellion named Babu-aḫa-iddina, the son of Nabu-aḫḫe-bulliṭ, to whom his father had bequeathed land rights. Babu-aḫa-iddina was charged with treason for breaking his official oath of loyalty to the crown and was convicted by the courts and sentenced to death for his crimes.

As soon as he was assured that the uprising was under control, Nebuchadnezzar again led his army out to Syria to collect his tribute, but the following year is where the primary Babylonian records about Nebuchadnezzar end. They describe Nebuchadnezzar rousing his army for a trip to Ḫatti once again but do not elaborate, timing that coincides with the accession of Psammetichus II to the Egyptian throne in 595 B.C.

In the next year (594 BC), Zedekiah of Judah made a visit to Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon, most likely to assure him of his continued loyalty (Jer. 51:59), and the prophet Jeremiah, whose politics had always been pro-Babylonian, offered to help Zedekiah with this visit. In great prophetic fashion, Jeremiah composed a letter containing an oracle about the ultimate destruction of Babylon (Jer. 51:1-58) and instructed Zedekiah to

read the letter aloud and cast it into the Euphrates River, signifying with this act that any plans to destroy Babylon were doomed to fail (Jer. 51:61-64).

In 589 B.C., Psammetichus II died, and his son Hophra (also called Apries) took the Egyptian throne. Some scholars suggest that this marked a turning point in Nebuchadnezzar's foreign policy as it related to the small city-states in the Ḫatti region. Rather than allowing them to continue to rule themselves independently as vassal states of Babylonia, he would conquer them and rule over them himself so that they would become Babylonian provinces. Both Zedekiah and the king of Ammon got wind of this change in policy, and confident in the support he would receive from the new Egyptian Pharaoh Hophra, Zedekiah now took his stand against Nebuchadnezzar and refused to pay his annual tribute.

In response to Zedekiah's defiance, Nebuchadnezzar brought the force of his entire Babylonian army against the city of Jerusalem in 588 BC. They began by building a circumvallation wall around the city. As soon as Zedekiah realized Nebuchadnezzar was coming for him, he sent the commander-in-chief of the Judean army, Koriah, to appeal to Egypt and its new Pharaoh for support, but the new Pharaoh's sorry excuse for support only managed to create a minor diversion for the Babylonian army. This minor diversion allowed some of the inhabitants of the city to escape, but it certainly was not what Zedekiah was hoping to receive. The Judean prophet Jeremiah tried to leave the city at this time as well, purportedly for business reasons, but Jerusalem officials caught Jeremiah attempting to leave and questioned him. They did not buy his story that in the middle of this life-threatening siege to the city, he had to buy a field in a neighboring village. Therefore, they arrested him and charged him with deserting to the Babylonians, which is what they suspected was his true motive for trying to leave the city, and then beat him and threw him into a prison. (Jer. 37:11-15).

The siege of Jerusalem lasted only two years, and it's clear from Jeremiah's prophecies that Nebuchadnezzar's army was not only attacking Jerusalem itself but several of the fortified cities of Judah that were supporting it: "… the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left, Lachish and Azekah; for these were the only fortified cities of Judah that remained." (Jer. 34:7). In February 1935,

archaeologists digging at Tell ed-Duweir, the site of ancient Lachish in Israel, found 18 inscribed potsherds, called ostraca.

One of the ostraca

These Lachish ostraca provide a close-up look at what this siege was like for the inhabitants who lived (or died) through it. The fourth letter is most telling for this context and its text reads as follows:

"May Yahweh cause my lord to hear good tidings even now today!

I have written on the (gate) door according to all (the instructions) which you sent to me.

With regard to (the instructions) which my lord sent about the matter of Beth-ha-rapid, there is no one (left) there.

And as for Semachiah, Shemaiah took him and sent him up to the city; and (hence) I, your servant, am unable to send him thither again today; but surely in the course of (tomorrow) morning, I shall send (him).

And may (my lord) know that we are watching for the fire-signals of Lachish according to all the signs which my lord arranged, for we can no longer see (the signals of) Azekah."

The letter was written from one military official to another stationed at Lachish. The third section of the letter talks about a city that has either been

abandoned in the course of the battle or destroyed by the Babylonians, and the fourth section deals with a prisoner and his transport. The final section speaks of a system of fire signals that the Judeans used to relay messages, and this type of system was portrayed on screen in the movie adaptation of J. R. R. Tolkien's book Lord of the Rings: Return of the King. The author of this letter is in somewhat of a panic, because the city that it looks to in the line of successive fortifications, Azekah, is now no longer visible, but he assures his commander that they have instructed their lookout to watch Lachish instead. Archaeological finds also indicate that the Babylonians also destroyed the Judean towns of Beth Shemesh, Gezer, and Tell el-Hesi at this time.

The Babylonian army finally managed to breach the city wall that was protecting Jerusalem in 587 B.C., allowing them to swarm into the city. There appears to have been a few months of negotiations between the Babylonians and the Judeans regarding terms of surrender, and during that time King Zedekiah fled under cover of night. The Babylonians spotted him and gave chase, finally capturing him around the city of Jericho. Zedekiah was brought to the seat of Nebuchadnezzar's operations in Ḫatti, the city of Riblah, where the Babylonians paraded Zedekiah's sons before him and killed them in front of his eyes. Then the guards turned their swords on Zedekiah himself and gouged out his eyes. Having lost his sons and his eyesight, they bound him in chains and led him captive to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar then ordered his general, Nebuzaradan, to plunder the palace and Jerusalem's temple before setting them both ablaze. He was then to go throughout the city, destroying all of the prominent architectural structures and other infrastructure, essentially razing the city to the ground. Nebuzaradan then collected the majority of the local population and transported them as captives to Babylon, the most prominent deportation of people from Judah. The date of this population transfer, 586 B.C., is the one most commonly cited when speaking of the Judean exile. Nebuzaradan left intact the royal estates at Tell Beit Mirsim and Ramat Rahel so that they could continue to supply fine wine to Babylon, as they had previously done for the palace in Jerusalem.

Chapter 5: Nebuchadnezzar and the Hanging Gardens

A 16th-century hand-colored engraving of the "Hanging Gardens of Babylon" by Dutch artist Martin Heemskerck, with the Tower of Babel in the background

Depending on the writings of several writers, Nebuchadnezzar may have saved his most important irrigational operations for his wife. In antiquity, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon were considered a technological marvel and an aesthetic masterpiece. Reputedly, they were created by Nebuchadnezzar II to please his homesick wife, after the model of Egyptian pleasure gardens. Many ancient writers discussed the Hanging Gardens, including Strabo, Diodorus Siculus, and Quintus Curtius Rufus. Moreover, Diodorus Siculus and Philo of Byzantium both described the mechanisms of the Gardens at length.

According to their accounts, the Hanging Gardens were terraced and cultivated orchards that were built over a series of buildings made of glazed ceramic and perhaps watered by some kind of pulley or pump system of irrigation. Water was drawn from a reservoir through a network of reeds and bricks, held together by asphalt and cement, with lead used as a sealant. The

Gardens were built on a citadel 80 feet high with walls 22 feet thick.

Diodorus Siculus described the Hanging Gardens in detail:

"There was also, beside the acropolis, the Hanging Garden, as it is called, which was built, not by Semiramis, but by a later Syrian king to please one of his concubines; for she, they say, being a Persian by race and longing for the meadows of her mountains, asked the king to imitate, through the artifice of a planted garden, the distinctive landscape of Persia. The park extended four plethra on each side, and since the approach to the garden sloped like a hillside and the several parts of the structure rose from one another tier on tier, the appearance of the whole resembled that of a theatre. When the ascending terraces had been built, there had been constructed beneath them galleries which carried the entire weight of the planted garden and rose little by little one above the other along the approach; and the uppermost gallery, which was fifty cubits high, bore the highest surface of the park, which was made level with the circuit wall of the battlements of the city. Furthermore, the walls, which had been constructed at great expense, were twenty-two feet thick, while the passage-way between each two walls was ten feet wide. The roof above these beams had first a layer of reeds laid in great quantities of bitumen, over this two courses of baked brick bonded by cement, and as a third layer of covering of lead, to the end that the moisture from the soil might not penetrate beneath. On all this again earth had been piled to a depth sufficient for the roots of the largest trees; and the ground, when levelled off, was thickly planted with trees of every kind that, by their great size or other charm, could give pleasure to the beholder. And since the galleries, each projecting beyond another, all received the light, they contained many royal lodgings of every description; and there was one gallery which contained openings leading from the topmost surface and machines for supplying the gardens with water, the machines raising the water in great abundance from the river, although no one outside could see it being done. Now this park, as I have said, was a later construction." -

According to Strabo, “The garden is quadrangular, and each side is four

plethra long. It consists of arched vaults which are located on checkered cube-like foundations. The ascent of the uppermost terrace-roofs is made by a stairway...” The text attributed to Philo also described the Hanging Gardens in remarkable detail:

"The Hanging Gardens has plants cultivated at a height above ground level, and the roots of the trees are embedded in an upper terrace rather than in the earth. This is the technique of its construction. The whole mass is supported on stone columns, so that the entire underlying space is occupied by carved column bases. The columns carry beams set at very narrow intervals. The beams are palm trunks, for this type of wood – unlike all others – does not rot and, when it is damp and subjected to heavy pressure, it curves upwards. Moreover it does itself give nourishment to the root branches and fibres, since it admits extraneous matter into its folds and crevices. This structure supports an extensive and deep mass of earth, in which are planted broad-leaved trees of the sort that are commonly found in gardens, a wide variety of flowers of all species and, in brief, everything that is most agreeable to the eye and conducive to the enjoyment of pleasure. The whole area is ploughed in just the same way as solid ground, and is just as suitable as other soil for grafting and propagation. Thus it happens that a ploughed field lies above the heads of those who walk between the columns below. Yet while the upper surface of the earth is trampled underfoot, the lower and denser soil closest to the supporting framework remains undisturbed and virgin. Streams of water emerging from elevated sources flow partly in a straight line down sloping channels, and are partly forced upwards through bends and spirals to gush out higher up, being impelled through the twists of these devices by mechanical forces. So, brought together in frequent and plentiful outlets at a high level, these waters irrigate the whole garden, saturating the deep roots of the plants and keeping the whole area of cultivation continually moist. Hence the grass is permanently green, and the leaves of trees grow firmly attached to supple branches, and increasing in size and succulence with the constant humidity. For the root [system] is kept saturated and sucks up the

> all-pervading supply of water, wandering in interlaced channels beneath the ground, and securely maintaining the well-established and excellent quality of trees. This is a work of art of royal luxury [lit. 'riotous living'], and its most striking feature is that the labor of cultivation is suspended above the heads of the spectators."

Due to the different levels that the water had to be carried up in order to maintain them, and the fact that this was accomplished over the course of several centuries, the Hanging Gardens and the manner in which it was irrigated would have definitely represented one of antiquity's greatest technological marvels. The creation and sustenance of the Hanging Gardens would be made all the more amazing by the fact that they were being kept in such a hot and dry climate, no doubt providing a startling sight that would stand out even in one of antiquity's great cities. In fact, the descriptions provided by ancient writers indicates that water was transported upwards by something resembling an Archimedes screw (which was only known to have existed in the ancient world around the 3rd century B.C.), and estimates based on their descriptions suggest irrigating the Hanging Gardens would've required over 8,000 gallons of water per day.

The famous hanging gardens of Babylon pose several challenges for historians. On the one hand, the classical sources are replete with references by various travelers who claim to have seen the hanging gardens of Babylon firsthand, and these varied sources are fairly consistent in the details they provide about these gardens. This meant that throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period, scholars had no doubt about the authenticity of this tradition or the location of these gardens, but for scholars in the 21st century, the situation has changed somewhat.

On the other hand, the sheer amount of water required and the fact that they would've required technology that was supposedly invented 400 years down the line cast doubt upon their existence. Officially, the reason why it is not known whether the Hanging Gardens ever existed is because they were reported to have been destroyed by several earthquakes, the last of which left the Hanging Gardens completely ruined by the 2nd century B.C., around the time the Greek "tourists" were writing their pamphlets and accounts of this ancient wonder of the world. Therefore, it is not known if any of the writers

who described them ever saw the true Hanging Gardens, and though ancient Greeks and Romans of different centuries wrote about the Hanging Gardens and relied on previous ancient texts, Babylonian sources do not mention them.

In fact, it is the lack of corroboration by the Babylonians and the city itself that most trouble scholars. Despite the hundreds of thousands of Neo-Babylonian texts that have been excavated and translated now, there are still no primary native references to these hanging gardens, something that defies explanation if the gardens truly existed. In fact, multiple reliable authors exclude this expected feature from their descriptions of Babylon, its landscape, and environs. Herodotus described Babylon in great detail, and he mentions the walls of Babylon, its palaces, its temples, and the customs associated with these temples, but he didn't make a single mention of these famed gardens. The absence is so glaring that Stephanie Dalley, a scholar at Oxford University who has pioneered the recent research into the Hanging Gardens, entitled one of her recent articles, "Why Did Herodotus not Mention the Hanging Gardens of Babylon?" In this article, Dalley begins by affirming a fact that late 19th century scholars doubted, that Herodotus likely did visit Babylon and had firsthand knowledge of the city. She goes on to demonstrate that the Neo-Babylonian empire to which Nebuchadnezzar II belonged considered itself the continuation of the Neo-Assyrian empire by pointing to various attempts to maintain a sense of continuity between the two dynasties. After making these two important points, Dalley asks her original question again, "Why did Herodotus not mention the Hanging Gardens?"

Other well-known ancient historians are also silent on the matter. No mention of the Hanging Gardens appears in the *Cyropaedia* by Xenophon either. This work was a biography of sorts of Cyrus the Great, and Babylon figures prominently as one of the empires that Cyrus destroyed. Here again, the absence of any mention of the Hanging Gardens is glaring.

In addition to those two famous Greek writers, several renowned Roman historians fail to mention the existence of the gardens. In Plutarch's biography of Alexander the Great, there is nothing about the Hanging Gardens. Perhaps just as surprising is the description of Babylon in Pliny the

Elder's *Natural History*, where he describes the walls of Babylon and the great temple of Jupiter Bel but makes no mention of the Hanging Gardens. The Hanging Gardens, as described in other classical sources, are exactly the type of topographic feature that Pliny set out to describe for readers, yet they do not even warrant a nod from him. After taking the time to summarize all of the available classical descriptions of the Hanging Gardens, the scholar E. A. Wallis Budge found them to be so self-contradictory that he declared emphatically, "In my opinion a Garden of this size and kind never existed at Babylon" (Budge, 1920, 298).

The silence here is not only limited to the literary sources but extends to the archaeological record as well. Mesopotamia is one of the most professionally excavated regions in the world, and the city of Babylon, including the main palace complex, has been excavated extensively. Naturally, the first excavation team, led by Robert Koldewey, attempted to both identify and reconstruct the location of the Hanging Gardens within the palace complex. But ultimately, his identification and reconstruction were so faulty that just about every subsequent archaeologist and historian has torn it apart. The original excavation was unable to make a solid identification of the location of the Hanging Gardens, and no subsequent proposal for the location of the Hanging Gardens in Babylon has been able to garner any significant support.

Furthermore, the Babylonian documents provide no information regarding Nebuchadnezzar's wives, which is not surprising since the names of a king's wives and daughters rarely survive, unless there was some unusual situation that warranted mentioning. In fact, the references to Nebuchadnezzar's Median wife, Amytis, are based upon classical sources, not Babylonian documents. But the tradition as presented in the classical sources maintains that as Amytis would stroll through the palace with her husband and enjoy the views overlooking the city that she often commented on the lack of trees and hills in this alluvial plain of Mesopotamia. She longed for the lush rolling landscapes of her home in Media. Nebuchadnezzar, wanting to give his young bride her every heart's desire, set about constructing terraced gardens for her in Babylon.

One theory that has been advanced in the past few decades asserts that the classical sources were a little confused with regards to their geography and to

their history. In 1993, Stephanie Dalley proposed a theory that the gardens were ordered built by the Assyrian King Sennacherib a century earlier for his giant palace at Nineveh. She believed that the two sites were easily confused by ancient sources, resulting in the Gardens being incorrectly located in Babylon a century later.

Depiction of Assyrian king Sennacherib during a military campaign against the Babylonians.

On the face of it, asking whether the "Babylon" in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon actually referred to the famous city itself is absurd. After all, Babylon was a well-known city in Mesopotamia and served as the capital of the Babylonian empire for most of its existence. On the other hand, the confusion evident both in the ancient sources and the modern archaeological record concerning the Hanging Gardens indicates that an innovative solution along these lines might just be warranted.

She looked at the classical sources with an eye to whether they confused the city of Babylon or possibly conflated it with any other city, and she didn't have to look long before she found plenty of evidence to this effect. The first important source that she discovered in this connection was a series of

astronomical observations from Azarqiel of Toledo written in Aramaic. This document makes reference to the longest day of the year from the perspective of "Old Babylon." In and of itself, this would not have been a very significant reference, except when it is combined with the identification of the latitude from which the observation must have been made. Based on the latitude calculations, the "Old Babylon" to which this document referred is not the ancient city of Babylon everyone thinks of today but actually the Assyrian city of Nineveh.

If there are ancient references to "Old Babylon," it begs the question as to the intended referent of its counterpart "New Babylon." Dalley painstakingly outlined how and when these names came into use within the native Akkadian sources themselves. When Assyrian leader Sennacherib sacked and destroyed Babylon in 689 B.C., his army smashed or removed all of the cult statues of the prominent gods within the city. This left the city godless, with no king and in a state of ruin for a quarter century or so, while its former inhabitants lived in exile. It was Sennacherib's son, Esarhaddon, who set to work rebuilding Babylon in an attempt to restore it to its former glory. The restored city that rose out of the ashes of the old was then appropriately dubbed the "New Babylon."

But this leaves the problem of when exactly Nineveh would have been referred to as Babylon. Although other kings adopted the title "king of Babylon" after they defeated the city, Sennacherib did not participate in this naming convention. Instead, for evidence that Nineveh was called Babylon, Dalley turns to the technical history of the textual tradition of one of the most prominent Akkadian myths: Enuma Elish, the Epic of Creation. In the traditional Old Babylonian version of this epic, Marduk defeats Tiamat and establishes Babylon as the center of the universe. In the Assyrian version of this Epic, the god Marduk, who was the traditional god of Babylon, has been replaced by Assur, the eponymous deity of the city of Assur and the Assyrians. What Dalley draws attention to is the fact that although the Assyrians took the time to change the name of the deity who forms the hero of the epic, they left the name of the city that he founded, Babylon, unchanged. For Dalley this makes little sense. If they were concerned about Assyrianizing the epic, why stop at the name of the deity and leave the Babylonian capital as the center of the world?

To answer the question, Dalley theorizes that the Assyrianizing process took place during the period of Sennacherib's reign, and that while the actual Babylon lay in ruins and was godless, the Assyrians began to call Nineveh by the name Babylon. After all, if Nineveh was referred to as Babylon, there would be no need for any further change to the text of the myth, because the renaming of Nineveh to Babylon would make it the center of the world. The god Assur, as the hero of the epic, now establishes Babylon as the center of the world, and Babylon now refers to Nineveh.

Evidence for the renaming of Nineveh as "Babylon" by the Assyrians appears in some of the surrounding cultures as well. The books of Chronicles in the Hebrew Bible present a retelling of the history of Israel and Judah, and at one point, they describe how the Assyrians took Manasseh captive to their capital city. But when the books name the capital city, they do not use the expected name Nineveh but instead use the name Babylon: "Therefore the LORD brought against them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh captive in manacles, bound him with fetters, and brought him to Babylon" (2 Chr. 33:11). Not only was Babylon not the capital of Assyria, this was the very period when Babylon lay in ruins. As such, it is the exact period when Dalley argues that Nineveh was going by the name Babylon.

In addition to this Judean source, there is also a Greek source that provides evidence for the use of the name Babylon to refer to Nineveh. Diodorus Siculus describes many exploits of a legendary queen, whom he calls Semiramis, and she is identified as an Assyrian queen who is responsible for multiple building projects in "Babylon". At that time, however, the Assyrian rulers did not rule over Babylon, and just as importantly, the actual details of the building projects indicate that these projects were located in Assyria, most likely Nineveh, not Babylon. He wrote that Semiramis decorated her building projects with hunting scenes that included a wide variety of wild animals, and that the queen herself appears on one of these portraits riding horseback and impaling a leopard while her husband spears a lion beside her.

As the various accounts, historical facts, and theories make clear, the Hanging Gardens are by far the most mysterious of the ancient Seven Wonders of the World. While it might be impossible to ever determine the

location of the ancient wonder with certainty, it was at the Assyrian capital of Nineveh that Sennacherib boasted that he constructed a garden to rival all gardens as a wonder for the entire world to see, replete with a description of the innovative water-raising device used centuries before Archimedes made his screw. He even dedicated his palace and the accompanying gardens to his queen and left inscriptions declaring his devotion to her. If the Hanging Gardens were indeed Sennacherib's feat, it produces one of antiquity's greatest ironies. In Sennacherib's zeal to take all glory from Babylon by sacking the city, hauling off its deities and giving his capital city of Nineveh the name Babylon, he may have inadvertently given credit for one of his proudest accomplishments to his arch-nemesis.

Chapter 6: Babylon under the Achaemenid Persians

The rule of Nebuchadnezzar II was a golden age for Babylonian culture and foreign affairs, but it all quickly collapsed upon his death. Once he was gone, the royal court of the Neo-Babylonian Dynasty devolved into an orgy of violence and regicide. Nebuchadnezzar II's son, Amel-Marduk (561-560 BC), ruled less than two years before being assassinated by his successor Nerglissar (559-556) (Kuhrt 2010, 2:597). Little is known about Nerglissar's rule, but his son, Labashi-Marduk, succeeded him on the throne for little more than a month before he too was assassinated (Kuhrt 2010, 2:597). The final king of the Neo-Babylonian Dynasty, Nabonidus (555-539), had no direct ties to the royal family but ruled for an extended period of time (Kuhrt 2010, 2:597). The length of Nabonidus' rule produced a number of inscriptions that place the collapse of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty in its proper historical context.

As the Neo-Babylonian royals were preoccupied with killing each other, a new dynasty began to grow to the east of Mesopotamia in the southeastern edge of the Zagros Mountains. The new group that would enter the ancient Near Eastern geopolitical situation was an Indo-European ethnic group known as the Persians, and the royal dynasty they established was known as the Achaemenid (Briant 2002, 16-17). While the Achaemenid Persians were establishing their kingdom across the Zagros, Nabonidus was more concerned with religious reforms in Babylon and Mesopotamia. The extant texts paint a picture of Nabonidus as a weak ruler who committed sacrilege by removing the cult statues of the gods of important Mesopotamian cities and having them placed in Babylon. Ultimately, the inhabitants of those cities let Cyrus the Great, the king of the Achaemenid Persians, march in and occupy them without resistance. The Nabonidus chronicle states: "In the month of . . . [Lugal-Marada and the other gods] of the town Marad, Zababa and the (other) gods of Kish, the goddess Ninlil [and the other gods of] Huragkalama entered Babylon. Til the end of the month Ululu (all) the gods of Akkad . . . those from about the IM and (those from) below the IM, entered Babylon. The gods from Borsippa, Kutha, . . . and Sippar (however) did not enter. In the month of Tashritu, when Cyrus attacked the army of Akkad in Pis on the Tigris, the inhabitants of Akkad revolted, but he

(Nabonidus) massacred the confused inhabitants. The 14th day, Sippar was seized without battle. Nabonidus fled. The 16th day, Gobryas (Ugbaru), the governor of Gutium and the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without battle. Afterwards Nabonidus was arrested in Babylon when he returned. . . From the month of Kislimu to the moth of Addaru, the gods of Akkad which Nabonidus had made come down to Babylon . . . returned to their sacred cities…" (Pritchard 1992, 306).

Cyrus's supposedly easy conquest of Babylon took place in 539 BC, and this conquest is discussed in the so-called Cyrus Cylinder. The Cylinder is a statement of the Persian king's legitimacy to rule Babylon and his acceptance of the all-important cult of Marduk. The Cylinder says, "He (furthermore) interrupted in a fiendish way the regular offerings, he did . . . he established within the sacred cities. The worship of Marduk, the king of the gods, he [chang]ed into abomination, daily he used to do evil against his city. . . He [tormented] its [inhabitant]s with corvée-work without relief, he ruined them all. Upon their complaints the lord of the gods became terribly angry and [he departed from] their region, (also) the (other) gods living among them left their mansions, wroth that he had brought (them) into Babylon . . . And he (Cyrus) did always endeavor to treat according to justice the black-headed whom he (Marduk) has made him conquer. Marduk, the great lord, a protector of his people/worshippers, beheld with pleasure his (i.e. Cyrus') good deeds and his upright mind (and therefore) ordered him to march against his city Babylon . . . Without any battle, he made him enter his town Babylon, sparing Babylon any calamity. He delivered into his hands Nabonidus, the king who did not worship him (i.e. Marduk). All the inhabitants of Babylon as well as of the entire country of Sumer and Akkad, princes and governors (included), bowed to him (Cyrus) and kissed his feet, jubilant that he (he received) the kingship, and with shining faces. Happily they greeted him as a master through whose help they had come (again) to life from death (and) had all been spared damage and disaster, and they worshiped his name." (Pritchard 1992, 315-16).

The Biblical book of Daniel abounds with historical inaccuracies that can be found in any commentary on the book, whether it is simply identifying or trying to explain them away, but given Babylonian history, it seems one of the most important historical inaccuracies of the book can be explained as a

conflation of Nebuchadnezzar with Nabonidus. The fourth chapter of the book of Daniel states:

> "At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, and the king said, 'Is this not magnificent Babylon, which I have built as a royal capital by my mighty power and for my glorious majesty?' While the words were still in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven: 'O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: The kingdom has departed from you! You shall be driven away from human society, and your dwelling shall be with the animals of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like oxen, and seven times shall pass over you, until you have learned that the Most High has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals and gives it to whom he will.' Immediately the sentence was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven away from human society, ate grass like oxen, and his body was bathed with the dew of heaven, until his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers and his nails became like birds' claws." (Dan. 4:29-33 NRSV)

William Blake's 18th century painting of Nebuchadnezzar depicts Daniel's description

The idea that the king of Babylon went mad and went into exile for several years has historical precedent in the Neo-Babylonian tradition, but it belongs to Nabonidus, the last of the Neo-Babylonian kings, not Nebuchadnezzar himself. Scholars suspected that the book of Daniel was talking about Nabonidus rather than Nebuchadnezzar for years, but they had little more than speculation to back up their intuition until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Among the scrolls, one text stated:

> "The words of the prayer uttered by Nabunai king of Babylon, [the great] king, [when he was afflicted] with an evil ulcer in Teiman by decree of the [Most High God].
>
> I was afflicted [with an evil ulcer] for seven years…and an exorcist pardoned my sins. He was a Jew from among the [children of the exile of Judah, and he said], 'Recount this in writing to [glorify and

exalt] the name of the [Most High God'. And I wrote this]:

> 'I was afflicted with an [evil] ulcer in Teiman [by decree of the Most High God]. For seven years [I] prayed to the gods of silver and gold, [bronze and iron], wood and stone and clay, because [I believed] that they were gods…'" (4QprNab)

The incorporation of the city Teima(n) along with the name Nabunai clearly connects this tradition with Nabonidus instead of Nebuchadnezzar and provides the "missing link" in the development of the tradition.

Modern scholars have argued that some aspects of these historical texts – namely the sections that stress Nabonidus' lack of piety towards Marduk or sacrilege towards other Mesopotamian gods – may have been intended as propaganda in order to make Cyrus appear as a legitimate Babylonian king and not a foreign usurper (Kuhrt 2010, 2:598-601). Although this very well may be true and Nabonidus may not have been as impious as he is portrayed, the reality is that he did seem to miss the rise of Persian power altogether. The Achaemenid Persians consolidated their power in the Iranian plateau, and Nabonidus did nothing to check its growth, which ultimately cost him the throne and destroyed the Neo-Babylonian Dynasty.

The fate of Babylon under Achaemenid Persian rule proved to be much different than what the city endured under the Assyrians and Hittites. The Persians did not lay waste to the temples or ziggurats, nor did they take the Marduk statue away; in fact, things did not change much under Achaemenid Persian rule. Documents indicate that the Persians derived considerable revenue from the Babylonian temples, but their rights, or even power, were not reduced below the levels they enjoyed during the Neo-Babylonian Dynasty (Briant 2002, 74). Babylonian officials and bureaucrats were retained in their positions and not divested of any real power, and the important religious festivals, such as the New Year Festival, were kept by the Persians (Ehrenberg 2007, 95). In fact, the Achaemenid Persian kings used Babylon as one of their royal residences and were greatly influenced by Babylonian art, as can be seen from the ruins of their own city of Persepolis (Ehrenberg 2007, 102). Although Babylon lost its independence in 539 BC and became one of the 20+ satrapies (or provinces) in the Achaemenid Empire, its culture continued on as it had since the days of the First Dynasty.

The Persians were astute political thinkers and knew that if their subjects were allowed to retain their religious and cultural traditions, the chances of rebellion would be lessened.

Chapter 7: The Final Decline of Babylon

Babylonian culture continued under the Achaemenid Persians for over 200 years until yet another group of foreigners set their eyes on the great city. The Greeks were familiar with Babylon beginning in the early 6th century BC, when Greeks served in the Neo-Babylonian army as mercenaries (Kuhrt 2010, 2:608). Greek soldiers, adventurers, and writers were impressed with the wealth of Babylon, as their own land was poor and not nearly as old or venerated when they first began to arrive in the city (Kuhrt 2010, 2:608). However, when Alexander the Great and his Macedonian army defeated Darius III and the Achaemenid Persians at the Battle of Gaugemela in 331 BC Mesopotamia, Babylon passed over into Greek rule (Price 2001, 366). This was not just the beginning of Greek rule but also the beginning of Hellenism, the spread of Greek culture throughout all the foreign lands they ruled.

Ancient bust depicting Alexander the Great.

After Alexander the Great died in Babylon in 323 BC at the age of 32, his kingdom was divided by his generals. In 312 BC the Greek general Seleucus established a dynasty, the Seleucids, which ranged from Persia to Turkey (Price 2001, 367). The Seleucids left the civic and religious institutions of Babylon untouched and even supported them to a degree (Kuhrt 2010, 2:611), and the Seleucid kings followed a political program similar to the Achaemenid Persians in regards to Babylonian culture. One of the best primary sources that demonstrate the Seleucids' attitudes towards Babylonian culture and religion is a badly damaged chronicle that depicts the crown prince Antiochus offering blessings and sacrifices to the Mesopotamian deities. The chronicle states, "The crown prince established in that place until the . . . regular offerings for Sin of Egishnugalu, Sin, lord of . . . [Antiochus], the prince, in the temple of Sin, Egishnugalu, . . . they bowed down. The prince [presented] one sheep as an offe[ring]. . . Egishnugalu, the temple of Sin, lord of [. . .] Bit-Gura, went out. In the month [. . . that same month, the Nth day] Seleucia, his army . . ." (Grayson 2000, 120). The Greek rulers of Babylon clearly made efforts to appear as legitimate rulers, much like their Achaemenid Persian predecessors, but unlike their predecessor, their very presence began to invariably change Babylon.

Although the Greeks may have been awed by the ostentatious nature of Babylonian wealth and respected the various religious rituals and cults, they ultimately contributed to the final decline of Babylon in a couple of ways. The large numbers of Greeks who immigrated to Mesopotamia during the Seleucid Dynasty contributed to the gradual erosion of Babylonian culture, and while the Seleucid kings may have respected the traditions of the Babylonians, the average Greek obviously wouldn't care much about Sin or Marduk. Hellenism by its very nature meant that Greeks could find many aspects of their homeland wherever a significant number of them lived, and therefore they never had to learn the local languages or traditions. At the same time, Seleucid kings themselves also began to replace elements of Babylonian culture with their own when it suited them.

The Babylonian literary tradition was one of the first victims of Hellenism and Greek rule. The oldest form of writing may have been invented in Mesopotamia, but it remained virtually unchanged by the time the Seleucids established their dynasty. Akkadian was still the language of the educated

Babylonians, and it was still written in the cuneiform script on clay tablets during Greek rule (Verbrugge and Wickersham 2001, 4). The cuneiform script was obstinate and outdated, even when compared to other ancient forms of writing – the Egyptians had adapted their language to use cursive forms of writing called hieratic and demotic – and the Greek rulers made no attempt to learn it, which relegated the ancient language and script to the dustbin of history (Verbrugge and Wickersham 2001, 4). One attempt was made to record the history of Mesopotamia by translating the ancient king-lists that were written in Sumerian and Akkadian into Greek, an effort undertaken by a high priest of Marduk named Berossos. Berossos published his *History of Babylonia* for the Seleucid king Antiochos I in 290 BC, but the work was written in Greek and much of it has been lost (Verbrugge and Wickersham 2001, 13). Berossos' history represents the only real attempt during the Seleucid Dynasty to preserve the literary and historiographical traditions of Babylon, and despite their efforts to maintain the Babylonian religious cults, those too declined during Greek rule.

Despite the offerings and donations that Seleukos I and Antiochus I made to the gods and the Great Temple of Babylon, any efforts to preserve Babylon as a great city were destined to failure when the Greeks built their own capital. Following in the Hellenistic tradition of building new cities in their conquered lands – Alexandria, Egypt being the most notable example – the Seleucids built their own new city in Mesopotamia, Seleukia, in 312 BC. Selukia was situated on the Tigris River and immediately became the intellectual center of Seleucid Mesopotamia until it eventually rivaled Babylon as an economic and political center (Verbrugge and Wickersham 2001, 14-15).

Babylon's slow descent into irrelevancy continued until the Parthians gained control of the city in 150 BC, after which it would never recover (Verbrugge and Wickersham 2001, 4). The Parthians had no use for Babylonian culture, and, unlike the Persians and Greeks, they did not care if they were viewed by the priests and other important locals as legitimate rulers. Perhaps it was fitting that Babylon, a city that saw its power ebb and wane over the course of several millennia, ultimately suffered its final decline due to a long period of neglect and cultural stagnation.

Bibliography

Briant, Pierre. 2002. *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*. Translated by Peter T. Daniels. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns.

Cochavi-Rainey, Zipora, trans and ed. 1999. *Royal Gifts in the Late Bronze Age Fourteenth to Thirteenth Centuries B.C.E.: Selected Texts Recording Gifts to Royal Personages*. Jerusalem: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press.

Cogan, Morton. 1974. *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah, and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press.

Curtis, J.E. and J.E. Reade, eds. 1995. *Art and Empire: Treasures from Assyria in the British Museum*. London: British Museum Press.

Drews, Robert. 1993. *The End of the Bronze Age: Changes in Warfare and the Catastrophe ca. 1200 B.C.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Edwards, I.E.S. 1972. *The Treasures of Tukankhamun*. London: Penguin Books.

Ehrenberg, Erica. 2007. "Persian Conquerors, Babylonian Captivators." In *Regime Change in the Ancient Near East and Egypt: From Sargon of Agade to Saddam Hussein*, edited by Harriet Crawford, 95-103. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Frankfort, Henri. 1996. *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

———. 1978. *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Grayson, A. Kirk, ed. 2000. *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns.

Haywood, John. 2005. *The Penguin Historical Atlas of Ancient Civilizations*. London: Penguin Books.

Kitchen, Kenneth A. 2003. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans.

Kuhrt, Amélie. 2010. *The Ancient Near East: c. 3000-330 BC*. 2 vols. London: Routledge.

Lichtheim, Miriam, ed. 1976. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*. Vol. 2, *The New Kingdom.* Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Macqueen, J.G. 1986. *The Hittites and Their Contemporaries in Asia Minor*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Mieroop, Marc van de. 2007. *A History of the Ancient Near East: ca. 3000-323 BC*. 2nd ed. London: Blackwell.

Pollock, Susan. 1999. *Ancient Mesopotamia: The Eden that Never Was*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Price, Simon. 2001. "The History of the Hellenistic Period." In *The Oxford History of Greece and the Hellenistic World*, edited by John Boardman, Jasper Griffin, and Oswyn Murray, 364-389. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pritchard, James B, ed. 1992. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. 3rd ed. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Redford, Donald B and K. S. Freedy. 1970. "The Dates in Ezekiel in Relation to Biblical, Babylonian and Egyptian Sources." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90: 462-485.

Sachs, A. 1952. "Babylonian Horoscopes." *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 6:

49-75.

Sandars, N.K. 1987. *The Sea Peoples: Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean, 1250-1150 BC.* London: Thames and Hudson.

Snell, Daniel C. 2011. *Religions of the Ancient Near East.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Soden, Wolfram von. 1994. *The Ancient Orient: An Introduction to the Study of the Ancient Near East.* Translated by Donald G. Schley. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans.

Stolper, Mathew W. 1993. "Literary, Ritual, and Mathematical Texts." In *The Royal City of Susa: Ancient Near Eastern Treasures in the Louvre*, edited by Prudence O. Harper, Joan Aruz, and François Tallon, 274-278. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Verbrugge, Gerald P, and John M. Wickersham, eds. 2001. *Berossos and Manetho, Introduced and Translated: Native Traditions in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt.* Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

The Hittites

Chapter 1: The Background of the Hittites

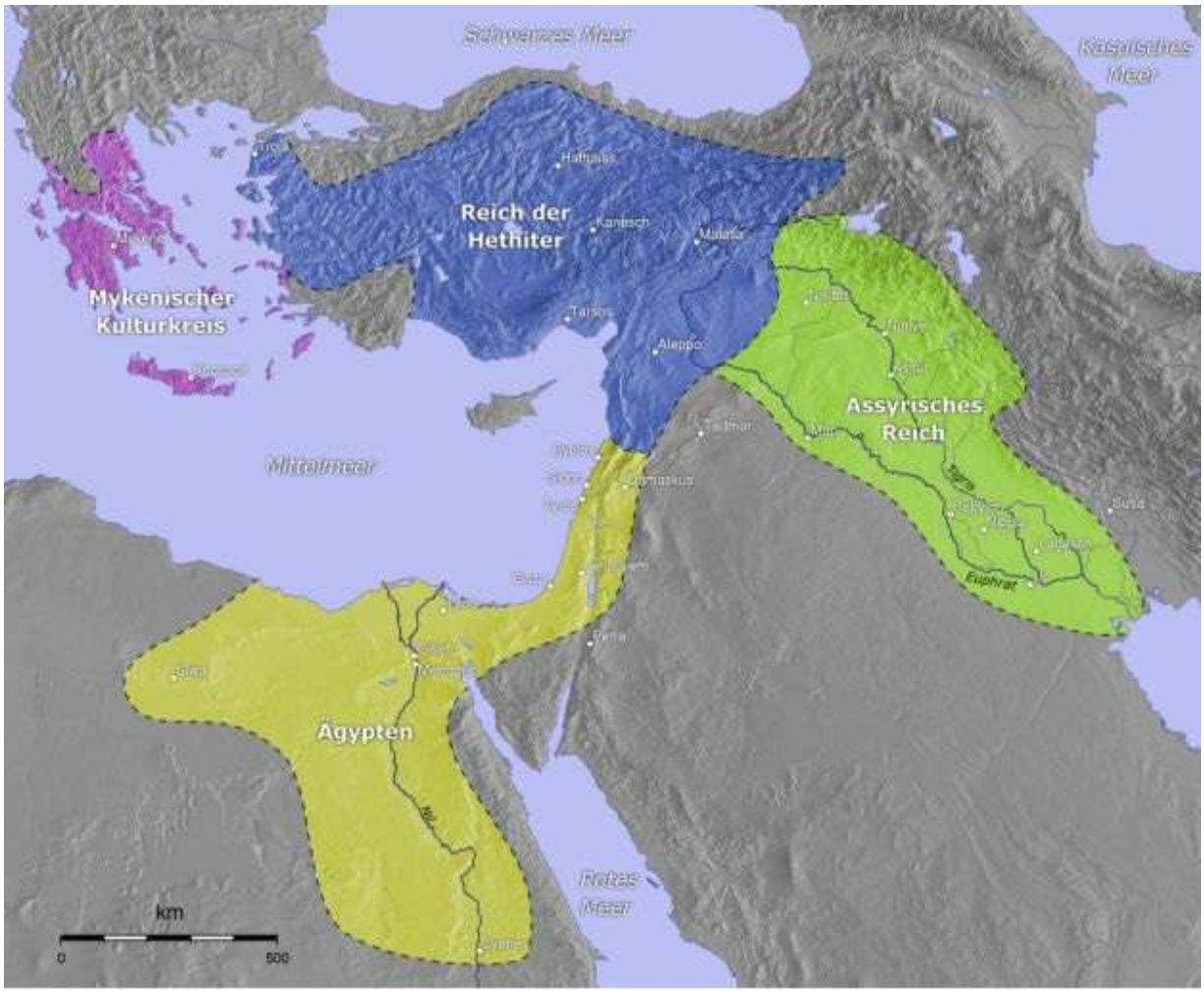
Although modern scholars knew about the Hittites through the Bible as well as Egyptian and various Mesopotamian texts, the culture remained enigmatic for a long time because the language was unknown. In fact, when historians discovered the ruins of ancient Hattusa in the late 19th century and the thousands of cuneiform tablets with Hittite inscriptions that were in it, it still took decades to decipher the language. Norwegian scholar J.A. Knudtzon was the first to decipher the Hittite language in 1902, which he termed Arzawan, and it was called as such for some time (Macqueen 2003, 25). Eventually, Arzawan was determined to be an Indo-European language, which proved to be an interesting discovery in itself since most of the neighboring kingdoms spoke languages that were either Semitic or derived from Afro-Asiatic.

Edouard d'Erasme's picture of a Hittite tablet

The cultural-linguistic origins of the Hittites can be a bit confusing when one considers the numerous names for their language and some of their Anatolian (modern day Turkey) neighbors. The Hittites called their language Nesili (van de Mieroop 2007, 119), while the Egyptians and Mesopotamians referred to them and their language as "Hittite" and their land as "Hatti" (Faulkner 1999, 198). Technically the Hittites spoke Arzawan (Macqueen 2003, 25), but Arzawa was also the name of a kingdom that neighbored Hatti,

and those people also spoke the same language as the Hittites. During the era of the Hittite civilization, there were three written Indo-European languages that coexisted in Anatolia: Hittite/Arzawan, Luwian, and Palic (Anthony 2007, 43). The earliest Hittite inscriptions are dated to around 1900 BCE, which makes the language the oldest written form of any Indo-European language (Anthony 2007, 43).

Almost as important as the Hittite's Indo-European background was their homeland in Anatolia. Anatolia, which is today known as Turkey, is a mountainous region rich in metal deposits that were economically important in the ancient Near East (Macqueen 2003, 15). Archaeological excavations have revealed that by 6000 BCE – before the Hittites had even entered the region – Anatolian metal smiths had mastered the intricate techniques of smelting and had begun to produce copper tools (Macqueen 2003, 15). The mineral rich mountains of Anatolia would help play a role that propelled the Hittites and their neighbors to economic and political power. But before the Hittites became the hegemonic power in Anatolia they would have to contend with a number of other kingdoms who also coveted the valuable minerals of the Anatolian mountains.



A map of the Hittite kingdom (in blue)

Modern scholars know about most of the Hittite's Anatolian neighbors through a combination of Hittite, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian texts, but the precise location of the kingdoms remains somewhat problematic. Due to the lack of any maps that have survived from the period, and also the overall absence of cartographic methods or knowledge by the Hittites and any of their contemporaries (the Greeks were the inventors/discoverers of cartography), modern scholars are left to locate the various non-Hittite Anatolian kingdoms based on historical texts that describe known mountain passes, rivers, and other geographical landmarks. This has occasionally resulted in differing opinions; for example, the most important Anatolian neighbor of the Hittites, Arzawa, is believed by some of have been located in southwestern Anatolia (Bryce 2007, 47), while other scholars find fault with this assessment, even though they agree that is was located somewhere in

western Anatolia. (Macqueen 2003, 38).

The Lukka lands are another region often referred to in the Hittite texts whose precise location continues to elude modern historians. Most believe that the Lukka lands were somewhere in western Anatolia, but how far west and how much area was encompassed by the Lukka is an open question, although it is now believed that “Lukka” may have been the Hittite term for Luwian (Macqueen 2003, 39). If Luka meant Luwian, then the actual geographic space may have fluctuated as Luwian speakers migrated through Anatolia. Scholars believe that the kingdom of Millawanda was also located near the Lukka lands in northwestern Anatolia (Macqueen 2003, 41). Hittite sources reveal that they probably also had contact with early Greek cultures in the form of the Achaean and Mycenaean peoples.

Moreover, Hittite texts refer to a land of Ahhiyawa, which is believed to have been either along the southwest Anatolian coast or on the adjacent islands where early Mycenaean settlements have been found (Kuhrt 2010, 1:237). Some historians believe that the similarity in the words “Ahhiyawa” and “Achaean” is evidence, along with archaeological revelations, that the Hittites were in contact with the early Greeks (Bryce 2007, 57-60). The Hittites may have also known and negotiated with the legendary city of Troy, which is now known to have been located in northwest Anatolia (Anthony 2007, 45).

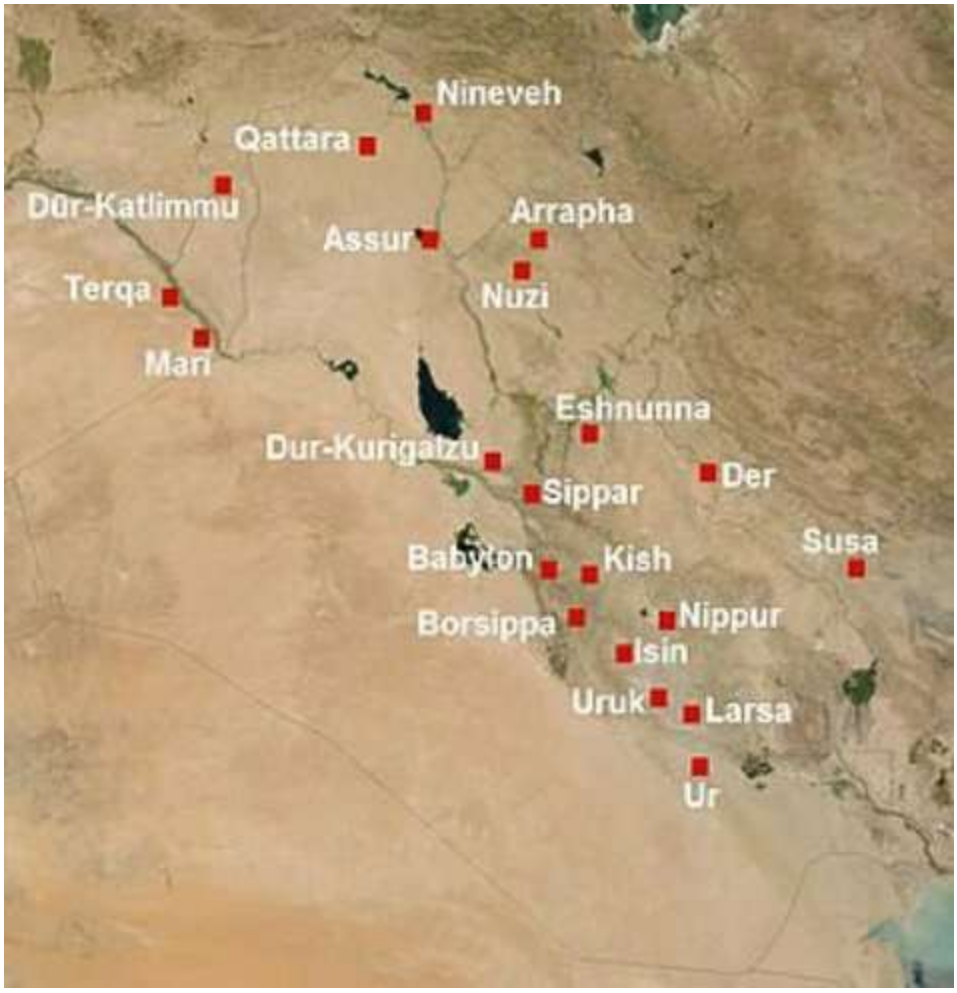
Chatter 2: The Hittite and Assyrian Trade Networks

Despite being located next to so many neighbors, some of whom were powerful in their own right (such as Arzawa and Ahhiyawa), it was the Hittites who eventually dominated the region and became a world power. Ironically, the road to their status as a power was arduous, and it began simply with an Assyrian trading post.

In the late third and early second millenniums BCE, the Assyrians, who lived to the south of the Hittites in northern Mesopotamia, developed sophisticated trade networks that snaked across central Anatolia and Mesopotamia. The Assyrian capital of Assur was the central point of the network that traded in textiles from Babylonia, tin from the east, and silver and gold from Anatolia (van de Mieroop 2007, 95). A lot has been learned

about this ancient merchant system from the discovery of more than 20,000 tablets that Assyrian merchants left in the Anatolian city of Kanesh, the early center of Hittite culture and the origin of the name they gave to their language – Nesi (Bryce 2007, 15). There were two types of Assyrian trading towns. The karum, which meant quay or harbor in Akkadian, was the primary trading center of a city, while the wabartum was a smaller trading center that functioned in a subordinate manner to the nearest karum (Kuhrt 2010, 1:92).

One of the most interesting aspects of the Assyrian trade network was that it was carried out largely by private entrepreneurs. The Assyrian king was not directly involved (van de Mieroop 2007, 97), and it's unclear why the Assyrian king did not take a more dominant role in the merchant activities of his people during the Old Assyrian period. Scholars have theorized that Assyrian kings might not have wanted to upset a system that worked, or that the kings were not yet powerful enough to influence such intricate networks.



Joey Hewitt's map of Mesopotamia during the 2nd millennium BCE

A map of the different empires in the region during the 15th century BCE

The journey from Ashur to Kanesh lasted about 50 days and was impossible during winter because the passages through the Taurus Mountains were blocked due to ice and snow (van de Mieroop 2007, 96). During trading seasons, Assyrian merchants carried the tin and textiles on donkeys that they all traded (including the donkeys) when they arrived in Anatolia for silver or gold. These merchants would then bring those goods back to Ashur (Kuhrt

2010, 1:94).

In turn, the Hittites would see more than just material and economic benefits from the Assyrian trade network. The earliest Hittite inscriptions coincide with their involvement in the Assyrian trade networks, which leads some modern scholars to conclude that the networks were the catalyst for Hittite literacy (van de Mieroop 2007, 119). This theory is more than plausible when one considers the spread of knowledge along other important trade routes throughout history. The Silk Roads of the late ancient and early mediaeval world were established primarily to transport exotic and manufactured goods between Asia and the West, but many concepts, including writing and numerous religions, also travelled along the roads. No doubt the Hittite merchants were impressed not only with the wealth of the Assyrian merchants but also their elevated level of culture, of which writing was a paramount symbol in the ancient world.

Ultimately, the culturally and economically lucrative Assyrian trade routes came to a sudden end with the arrival of a new ethnic group to the region, the Hurrians, around 1780 BCE (Macqueen 2003, 20). The Hurrians would later play a significant role in the history of the Hittite kingdom and the entire Near East, but at the time they appeared as simple and violent interlopers.

Chapter 3: The Hittite Old Kingdom

Klaus-Peter Simon's pictures of Hittite ruins at the city of Kültepe

Although the Hittites were a literate people and kept a large number of documents, recreating the chronology of their empire has remained difficult. Most of the extant Hittite inscriptions were written in the 14th and 13th centuries BCE, and it remains unclear if these were copies of earlier documents, or if they were merely set in previous periods for propaganda purposes (van de Mieroop 2007, 120). The issues confronting people's understanding of Hittite texts is not confined to the history of the Hittite kingdom either, as it is a problem that experts of any ancient Near Eastern society continue to face. In large measure, this is because of the fact that while the Hittites and their contemporaries kept detailed historical records, their concepts of history were vastly different than the modern one. Today's historiographical methods are largely influenced by the Greeks, who were the first people to write narrative and critical histories, whereas the Hittites and their contemporaries did not write history for edification purposes but instead

mixed myth and theology with historiography. As a result, modern historians like Mario Liverani have cogently argued that ancient Near Eastern texts must be viewed as sources of knowledge of the people who wrote them, not necessarily as accurate portrayals of the events described (Liverani 1973, 179-80).

Given these general problems concerning ancient Near Eastern historiography, in addition to more specific issues relating to Hittite historiography that will be discussed in more detail below, modern scholars have reconstructed Hittite chronology into two periods: the Old and New Kingdoms. This is the case despite the fact nobody is sure of the empire's precise chronology. For instance, there are no Hittite primary sources that detail the period from the end of the Assyrian trading settlements until the emergence of the Hittite state (Kuhrt 2010, 1:225).

Nonetheless, a fairly reasonable view of Hittite chronology can still be put together. The first king of the Hittite Old Kingdom was the eponymously named Hattusili I (ca, 1650-1620), who led the conquest of the central Anatolian city of Hattusa (Macqueen 2003, 36). One of the earliest Hittite historical texts, known as the "Anitta Text," is written in both the Hittite and Akkadian languages and reads like a literary autobiography, detailing how Anitta first became the Hittite "great prince" (Kuhrt 2010, 1:226-28). Although Hattusili I was descended from a different family than Anitta's, the text was viewed by the king as extremely important since it established the precedents of rule in the Hittite world and was actually written down during Hattusili's life, not Anitta's (Kuhrt 2010, 1:228).

The Anitta Text demonstrates that Hattusili saw the importance of legitimizing his royal family, but experts believe there was already a defined political structure in Hattusa before the dynasty was established. The elders of the various cities, high priests, and military commanders in Hittite society all formed an assembly, known in Hittite as the panku, which advised the king on important matters (Kuhrt 2010, 1:240). The panku may have been an ancient Indo-European tradition, similar to the Germanic teuta, that the Hittites brought with them into Anatolia (Macqueen 2003, 76). Regardless, Hattusili I subsequently established a dynasty and royal tradition to go along with preexisting Indo-European traditions and thereby formed a kingdom that

would last hundreds of years,

Perhaps the most important thing the first Hittite king did was to choose Hattusa as the capital. In the ancient Near East, certain cities played crucial roles in the cultural and political lives of ruling dynasties, sometimes to the point (as in the case of Babylon) that dynasties were identified with the city where they resided. Besides Babylon, some of the great cities of the ancient Near East were Memphis, Thebes, Byblos, Ur, Ashur, and Hattusa. The Hittite capital may not have been as old or as enduring as the other cities, but Hattusa was for a time on par with any of the other great Near Eastern cities as the heart of the vibrant Hittite Empire.

A map of Hittite cities in the 14th century

In fact, modern knowledge of the Hittites can all be traced back to Hattusa, as it was the location of the greatest number of textual and archaeological remains. Indeed, the city has been excavated continuously by German archaeologists since 1906 (Kuhrt 2010, 1:234). Hattusa was located both within the center of Anatolia and the middle of the Hittite territory in a

strategic hill-top position (van de Mieroop 2007, 121). As such, Hattusa was the center of Hittite religion (discussed further in depth below), and it was ideally located in the middle of Anatolia's agricultural breadbasket (Macqueen 2003, 53).

Bernard Gagnon's picture of the Lion Gate in Hattusa

China Crisis' picture of the ruins of the Great Temple at Hattusa

China Crisis' picture of the Yerpaki rampart outside of Hattusa

A picture of one of Hattusa's reconstructed walls

Reliefs located at Hattusa

Hattusa was different from the other major cities of the ancient Near East in one major respect: it was landlocked and not located on a major river. At first glance, such a situation may seem like a liability, which it was in terms of trade, but for the most part its central position meant that the Hittites could move their armies more efficiently from one theater of operations to another (Macqueen 2003, 56). As a landlocked capital, Hattusa was also safe from naval attacks from other kingdoms, so if the Hittites' enemies wanted to invade their capital, they would have to trek through the middle of the kingdom to get there, which was most unlikely.

As Hittite power grew during the Old Kingdom, the royal city of Hattusa became more important and even wealthier. From his citadel overlooking Hattusa, Hattusili I launched the first major Hittite attacks into the Near East, first conquering the cities between Hattusa and the Mediterranean (Macqueen 2003, 36). Hattusili I was able to take the port city of Alalah, which served as

a port for the ancient and prosperous city of Aleppo. Archaeological work at Alalah has confirmed that the attack, and subsequent sacking, took place between 1650-1600 BCE, which would probably place the event during the reign of Hattusili I.

The reasons for Hattusili I's military ventures outside of Anatolia are not clear, but there were probably numerous factors. The limited agricultural production of Anatolia, along with a population growth, may have spurred the Hittites covet the more fertile north Levantine/Syria region (van de Mieroop 2007, 121). Other intangible factors may have been in play too. For example, the warrior culture and militaristic nature of Hittite society no doubt propelled the early Hittite kings to strike out in order to appease their Storm god, and the material riches of the older cultures of the Levant and Mesopotamia may have been a motivating factor. Hattusili I also assaulted the Arzawan kingdom in Anatolia, perhaps for their tin supply (Macqueen 2003, 43), but he was ultimately forced back east when the Hurrians attacked that flank of the Hittite kingdom (Macqueen 2003, 44).

A Hittite engraving that depicts their god of war

Either way, Hattusili I established the precedent of an active, warrior Hittite king that most of his successors followed or at least attempted to follow, and the Hittite Old Kingdom witnessed its greatest extent of power and wealth under Hattusili I's successor and grandson, Mursili I (ca.1620-1590). Mursili I followed the same pattern of aggressive foreign policy with much more success, as he was able to sack Aleppo in 1595 BCE and take control of the southeastern trade routes as far as the middle Euphrates River region (Macqueen 2003, 44). Mursilis then did what no Hittite king did before or after him by successfully marching against and sacking Babylon. The

Babylonian Chronicle, which was essentially the history of Babylon compiled by Babylonian priests, gives a brief mention of Mursili I's campaign: "At the time of Samsu-ditana the Hittites marched against Akkad." (Grayson 2000, 156).

Hattusili I's reign was cut short when he was assassinated by his brother-in-law, Hantili I (ca. 1590-1560), who then ruled a relatively stable kingdom, but the peace soon dissipated and Hatti was plunged into a "dark age" (Kuhrt 1:244). The Hittite Dark Age lasted approximately 70 years and was marked by a number of violent coup d'états (Kuhrt 1:244), as well as the steady loss of all the lands gained by Hattusili I and Mursili I (Macqueen 2003, 46). The Dark Age ultimately ended with the accession of Telepinu (ca. 1525-1500 BCE) to the throne.

Today, historians know so much about what led to the Dark Age and its details because the events were meticulously recorded in what is now known as "The Edict of Telepinu." The Edict presents the king as the savior of the Hittite kingdom who restored order and glory to the empire. The text reads:

> "But, as Mursili reigned as king in Hattusa, his sons, his brothers, his in-laws, the people of his clan/family and his soldiers were gathered (around him in harmony), and he held the land of the enemy conquered with (his strong) arm. He conquered the lands in their entirety and made them into the frontiers of the sea.
>
> He went to Halpa (Aleppo) and destroyed Halpa, and the captive population of Halpa and their possessions he brought here to Hattusa. But after that he went (on) to Babylon and destroyed Babylon. He fought against the Hurrians and the captive population and their possessions he displayed in Hattusa.
>
> Hantili was cup-bearer (at that time) and had Har[apsili] the sister of Mursili as his wife. Zidanta led Hantili [. . .] on, and [they planned] an evil deed. They murdered Mursili and shed (lit, 'made') blood. . ." (Kuhrt 1:245)

The Edict then goes on to describe how Mursili's assassins met similar fates as the Hittite state crumbled. It continues, "As soon as Hantili [wa]s old and about to become a god (i.e. die), Zidanata murdered [Piseni] the son of

Hantili, together with his sons [and also] the nobl[est] of his servants he murdered. And Zidanta also ruled as king and the gods sought the blood of [Pi]seni and made Ammuna, his own son, into his enemy and he murdered his father Zidanta." (Kuhrt 1:245).

Eventually, Telepinu put an end to the fratricide and regicide that was rife at the Hittite court and established order once more by defeating his foreign enemies and codifying new laws:

> "As soon as I, Telepinu, seated myself on the throne of my father, I campaigned in Hassuwa (on route to Commagene) and destroyed Hassuwa. My troops were also in Zizzlippa, and there was a battle in Zizzlippa. . .
>
> Further, he who becomes king and plans evil against (his) brother (or his) sister, you (are) the assembly (panku) for him. Simply say to him: 'That matter is a blood-deed. Consult the tablet! Earlier the blood-deed was great in Hattusa, and the gods have imposed (it) on the 'Great Family.'
>
> Whoever does evil among (his) brothers (or his) sisters and (in doing that) looks at the head of the king (i.e. maintains that it is the king's responsibility), call together an assembly (panku, for him). If he is found guilty, then he shall be beheaded. But (he) shall not be killed secretly as with Zuru, Danuwa, Tahurwaili and Tarushu. Evil shall not be done to his house, his wife (and) his children. If a royal son acts criminally, he shall also pay with his head, but no evil shall be done to his house and his children. For whatever reason royal sons may be executed, (it has) no (meaning) for their houses, their fields, their vineyards, their slaves, their slave-girls, their cattle (and) their sheep." (Kuhrt 1:246-47).

Thanks to these efforts, Telepinu is viewed as one of the greatest Hittite kings, but before he could end the orgy of violence in the Hittite Dark Age, a new and powerful state came to power in Hatti's backyard. While the Hittites had been preoccupied with killing each other during the middle of the second millennium BCE, the Hurrian people coalesced and formed a powerful

kingdom in northern Mesopotamia and the Levant known as Mitanni. For a brief period, Mittani was one of the most powerful kingdoms in the ancient Near East, and it was a perpetual thorn in the Hittites' side for over 200 years.

Like the Hittites, the Hurrians had somewhat enigmatic origins. Although not an Indo-European speaking people, they worshipped Indic gods and introduced the chariot, which was developed by Indo-Europeans, into the ancient Near East (Anthony 2007, 50). The Indo-European element of Hurrian culture may have been introduced when a Hurrian king hired Indo-European mercenaries, who then subsequently overthrew the king and established their own dynasty (Anthony 2007, 50). Despite sharing some vague cultural similarities, the Hittites and Hurrians engaged in numerous wars that eventually resulted in the destruction of the Mittani state.

Chapter 4: The Hittite New Kingdom

The period of the Hittite's greatest influence on the ancient Near East is referred to as the New Kingdom, which began with the rule of Tudhaliya I (ca. 1430-1420), but it was Suppiluliuma I (ca. 1370-1330 BCE), sometimes referred to as "Suppiluliuma "the Great", who truly made the kingdom a strong, militaristic empire. There is an abundance of texts that document Suppiluliuma I's reign, but most are dated to a much later time during the reign of Hattusili III (ca. 1275-1245 BCE, which, as already discussed above, always needs to be considered when using ancient texts to reconstruct chronology.

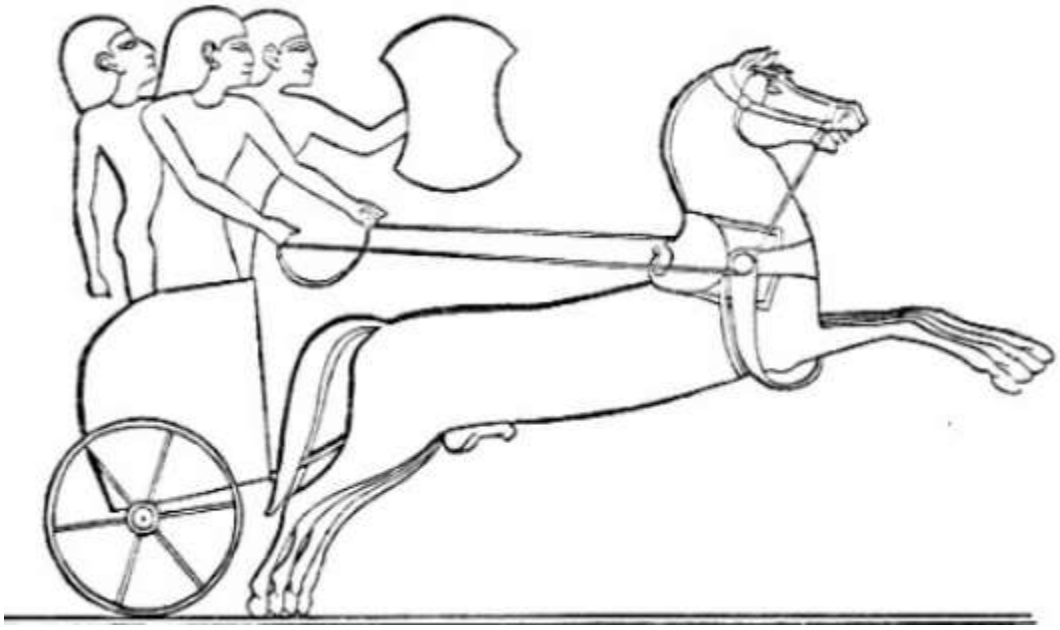
Map of the empire during the reign of Suppiluliuma I

Suppiluliuma I came to the throne while the mighty Amenhotep III ruled in Egypt and Kadashman-Enlil I sat on the throne in Babylon (Kuhrt 1:336). Known for his military endeavors, Suppiluliuma first conquered lands the

Hittites had lost in Anatolia during the Dark Age before he turned his attention south to Mittani (Macqueen 2003, 46). At the same time, Suppiluliuma was also a diplomat who saw the virtues of providing for his people through peaceful means. Instead of attacking Babylon and overextending his empire as Mursili I did, Suppiluliuma I contracted a marriage with the Babylonian king's daughter (Macqueen 2003, 46). Perhaps Suppiluliuma I hoped to one day make a claim to the throne of Babylon, or one of his potential future sons from the Babylonian princess could, but all of his sons appear to have been born to a Hittite queen (Bryce 2007, 28).

Despite Suppiluliuma I's diplomatic relations with Babylon and other great powers of the ancient Near East, it was military prowess that made the Hittite state strong and cemented its reputation in history. Not surprisingly, the Hittite army was a well-oiled machine that was employed surgically to root out problems across its empire and expand its borders. At the head of the army as commander in chief stood the Hittite king, who also often led his troops into battle (Macqueen 2003, 57).

Behind the king marched his troops, but at the head of the troops were the elite charioteers. Hittite chariots, like those of most of their contemporaries from other kingdoms, consisted of a wooden frame covered with leather, but they were different from their contemporaries in one notable respect: the axle was attached to the middle of the body rather than the rear (Macqueen 2003, 58). The design of the Hittite chariots meant that they were much slower than the chariots of their adversaries, but they had an advantage because three men (instead of the usual two) could ride in the chariot (Macqueen 2003, 58). A Hittite chariot team would consist of the driver, a shield bearer, and a warrior who usually fought with a stabbing spear (Macqueen 2003, 58). Conversely, the Egyptians used lighter chariots that could only hold two men, the driver and a shield bearer, with the driver also serving as an archer (Spalinger 2005, 18).



An ancient Egyptian depiction of a Hittite chariot

The elite Hittite chariot forces were supported by a larger infantry force that wore helmets and carried shields. Body armor, as seen from reliefs, appears to have been a leather sleeveless jacket that was worn over a corselet that was possibly bronze (Macqueen 2003, 63). The infantry would fight in a phalanx with long spears and then daggers when the phalanx was broken (Macqueen 2003, 59). While Egyptian charioteers used bows, it appears that only light infantry used the bow in the Hittite army, and, based on pictorial representations from Egyptian reliefs, it seems they never used composite bows (Spalinger 2005, 15). For the most part, the Hittites had roughly the same military technology as their contemporaries, but the Hittites kings were able to get the most out of those weapons to forge an empire

After Suppiluliuma I reasserted Hittite hegemony over Anatolia, he turned his attention south to the kingdom of Mittani. His first attack on Mittani was unsuccessful, but during the second attack he sacked the capital city of Washshukanni, which ultimately led to the murder of the Mittani king Tushratta at the hands of his own people (Kuhrt 1:253). Suppiluliuma I then made the wealthy Syrian cities of Carchemish and Aleppo vassal states and subjugated Mittani to a similar status (Macqueen 2003, 46-47).

The successful campaign was documented in a treaty between

Suppiluliuma I and the new Mittani king, Kurtiwaza: “I, the Sun Suppiluliuma, the great king, the king of the Hatti land, the valiant, the favorite of the Storm-god, went to war. Because of king Tusratta’s presumptuousness I crossed the Euphrates and invaded the country of Isuwa. . . I, the Sun Suppiluliuma, the great king, the king of the Hatti land, the valiant, the favorite of the Storm-god, reached the country of Alse and captured the provincial center Kutmar. To Antar-atal of the country of Alse I presented it as a gift. I proceeded to the provincial center Suta and ransacked it. I reached Wassukanni. The inhabitants of the provincial center Suta together with their cattle, sheep (and) horses, together with their possessions and together with their deportees I brought to the Hatti land, Tusratta, the king, had departed, he did not come to meet me in battle.” (Pritchard 1992, 318).

With the Hittites’ primary enemy defeated, Suppiluliuma I was able to concentrate on advancing his kingdom’s interest peacefully once more, and an olive branch came to him from Egypt in a most unusual way. There are no known primary documents dated before and during most of Suppiluliuma I’s reign that indicate any animosity existed between the Egyptians and Hittites (Schulman 1978, 44), but that would change at the end of the Hittite king’s rule. An extant Hittite text, dated to the reign of Mursili II, demonstrates that an Egyptian queen, probably the widow of the young king Tutankhamun, requested Suppiluliuma I to send one of his sons to Egypt for her to wed. The letter read, “While my father was down in the country of Karkamis, he dispatched Lupakkis and Tessub-zalmas to the country of Amqa. They proceeded to attack the country of Amqa and brought deportees, cattle (and) sheep home before my father. When the people of the land of Egypt heard about the attack on Amqa, they became frightened. Because, to make matters worse, their lord Bibhururiyas had just died, the Egyptian queen who had become a widow, sent and envoy to my father and wrote him as follows: ‘My husband died and I have no son. People say that you have many sons. If you were to send me one of your sons, he might become my husband. I am loath to take a servant of mine and make him my husband.’ . . . When my father heard that, he called the great into council . . . ‘Perhaps they have a prince; they may try to deceive me and do not really want one of my sons to (take over) the kingship,’ the Egyptian queen answered my father in

a letter as follows: ‘Why do you say: ‘They may try to deceive me’? If I had a son, would I write to a foreign country in a manner which is humiliating to myself and my country?” (Pritchard 1992, 319).

The letter was most unusual because although Egyptian kings quite frequently married foreign princesses, they never allowed their own princesses to marry foreigners (Schulman 1979). This may have played a role in what happened to the Hittite prince Zananza. A 9,000 man Hittite army marched south to the Levantine city of Amka with the Hittite prince Zananza, who was presumably set to marry the Egyptian queen, but things did not go as planned. Details of what happened were written down in the “Plague Prayer” of Mursili II. The text states, “My father sent foot soldiers and charioteers who attacked the country of Amka, Egyptian territory. Again he sent troops, and again they attacked it. When the Egyptians became frightened, they asked outright for one of his sons to (take over) the kingship. But when my father gave them one of his sons, the killed him as they led him there.” (Pritchard, 1992, 395).

The Zananza affair put the Egyptians and Hittites on a collision course and was probably the ultimate reason for Suppiluliuma I’s death. After the prince’s death, the Hittites and Egyptians engaged in battle, but it was the events after that war that had the most adverse impact on the Hittites. Egyptian prisoners of war who were infected with the bubonic plague passed the disease to Hittite soldiers, and they then brought the virus with them back to Anatolia (Goedicke 1984, 92). It is believed that the plague was the cause of Suppiluliuma I’s death, as well as the death of his son and successor, Arnuwanda (Kuhrt 1:254).

The nature of the plague remains somewhat mysterious since it was manifested long before the advent of modern medicine, but primary sources from both Egypt and Hatti help to define the disease’s pathology. Two medical papyri from Egypt’s Eighteenth Dynasty describe the virus as the “Canaanite Illness,” which may help assign its ultimate origin in the Levant but does little to describe its general nature (Goedicke 1984, 93). For a description of the plague’s effects on society, one has to turn to the “Plague Prayer” of Mursili II once more. The text states:

> “Hattian Storm-god, my lord, and ye, Hattian gods, my lords!

> Mursili, the great king, your servant, has sent me (with the order:) Go! To the Hattian Storm-god, my lord, and to the gods, my lords, speak as follows:
>
> What is this that ye have done? A plague ye have let into the land. The Hatti land has been cruelly afflicted by the plague. For twenty years now men have been dying in my father's days, in my brother's days, and in mine own since I have become the priest of the gods. When men are dying in the Hatti land like this, the plague is in no wise over. As for me, the agony of my heart and the anguish of my soul I cannot endure any more.
>
> When I celebrated festivals, I worshipped all the gods, I never preferred one temple to another. The matter of the plague I have laid in prayer before all the gods making vows to them (and saying): 'Hearken to me, ye gods, my lords! Drive ye forth the plague from the Hatti land!'" (Pritchard 1992, 394).

Although no description of the plague's physical effects on humans is described, the general chaos caused by the disease and the length of time it survived (20 years) has led many to deduce that it was a form of the bubonic plague (Goedicke 1984, 100). In fact, Goedicke argued that the Zananza plague was one of several outbreaks and was the reason why the Egyptian king Amenhotep I (ca. 1527-1507) withdrew Egyptian forces from the Levant for several years (Goedicke 1984, 104).

Despite the devastation in Hatti that was caused by the bubonic plague, Mursili II was able to eventually reestablish Hittite power in the region. Mursili II started his reign the same way many of his Hittite predecessors did by attacking the Anatolian rival kingdom of Arzawa, and as a result of his efforts, Mursili II was able to place a pro-Hittite king on the Arzawan throne, which effectively made the kingdom a vassal of the Hittites (Macqueen 2003, 47). To add insult to injury, Mursili II deported many of Arzawa's inhabitants and then defeated another Anatolian rival, Ahhiyawa (Kuhrt 2010, 1:256). With most of Anatolia once more placed under Hittite rule, Mursili II then turned his attention northwards to the always troublesome Gasga people. The Hittite king's efforts were at least temporarily successful, as he was able to reduce the threat the Gasga posed to Hattusa and thereby focus the Hittite

army to the south (Kuhrt 2010, 1:257).

Mursili II successfully saved the Hittite Empire from drifting into oblivion after the disaster of the bubonic plague, but it was his successor, Muwatalli II (ca. 1295-1272 BCE), who extended Hatti's borders the furthest south. At the same time, despite Muwatalli II's successes in the Levant, the Hittite king suffered setbacks in Anatolia at the hands of the Gasga people, a threat that forced Muwatalli II to temporarily move the capital from Hattusa further south. This resulted in fewer extant records from his reign (Macqueen 2003, 48).

Muwatalli II's imperial activities in the Levant would be more successful, but it would also lead the Hittites into a famous battle with the Egyptians. In 1286 BCE the Egyptians were expanding their influence northwards in the Levant, while the Hittites were moving south and encroaching on Egyptian vassal states, resulting in one of the best documented battles of the ancient world: the Battle of Kadesh (van de Mieroop 2007, 143).

The Egyptian empire (green) and the Hittite empire (red) circa 1279 BCE

At the time, the Egyptian pharaoh, Ramesses II (Ramesses the Great) wanted nothing less than to destroy the Hittite Empire and claim their territory for his own, and it was toward that end that he led his troops into the Levant in 1274 BCE. Ramesses had the details of his march inscribed after the battle:

> "Now then, his majesty had prepared his infantry, his chariotry, and the Sherden of his majesty's capturing,...in the Year 5, 2nd month of the third season, day 9, his majesty passed the fortress of Sile. [and entered Canaan] ... His infantry went on the narrow passes as if on the highways of Egypt. Now after days had passed after this, then his majesty was in Ramses Meri-Amon, the town which is in the Valley of the Cedar.

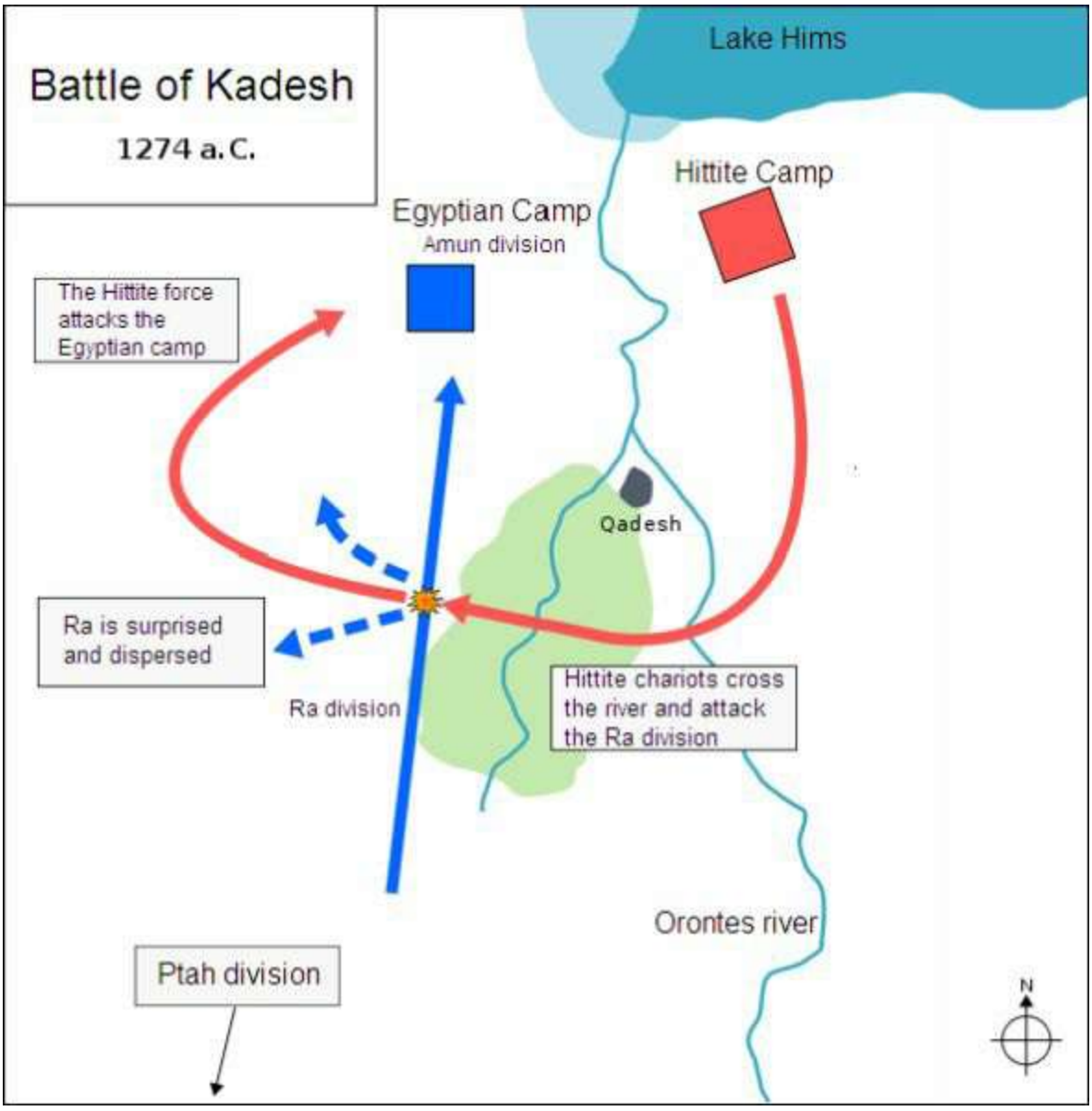
His majesty proceeded northward. After his majesty reached the mountain range of Kadesh, then his majesty went forward...and he crossed the ford of the Orontes, with the first division of Amon (named) ‘He Gives Victory to User-maat-Re Setep-en-Re’. His majesty reached the town of Kadesh ....The division of Amon was on the march behind him; the division of Re was crossing the ford in a district south of the town of Shabtuna at the distance of one iter from the place where his majesty was; the division of Ptah was on the south of the town of Arnaim; the division of Seth was marching on the road. His majesty had formed the first ranks of battle of all the leaders of his army, while they were (still) on the shore in the land of Amurru.”

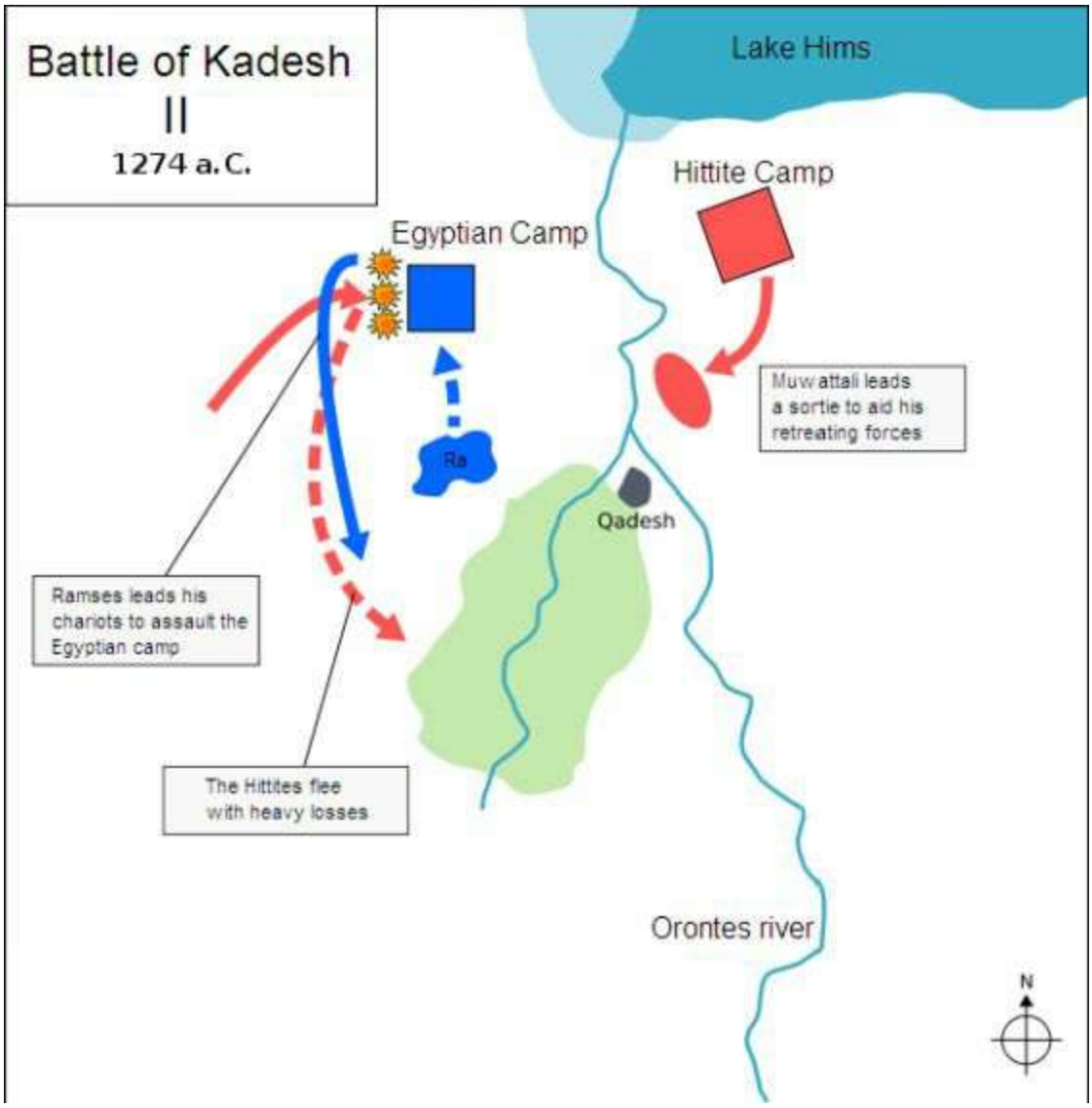
Ramesses II led his troops deeper into the territory of their enemy, but unlike the battle the Pharaoh had fought with the sea pirates, this time it was the Egyptians who were trapped and ambushed. Ramesses and his men caught and interrogated some spies that set him down a fatal path:

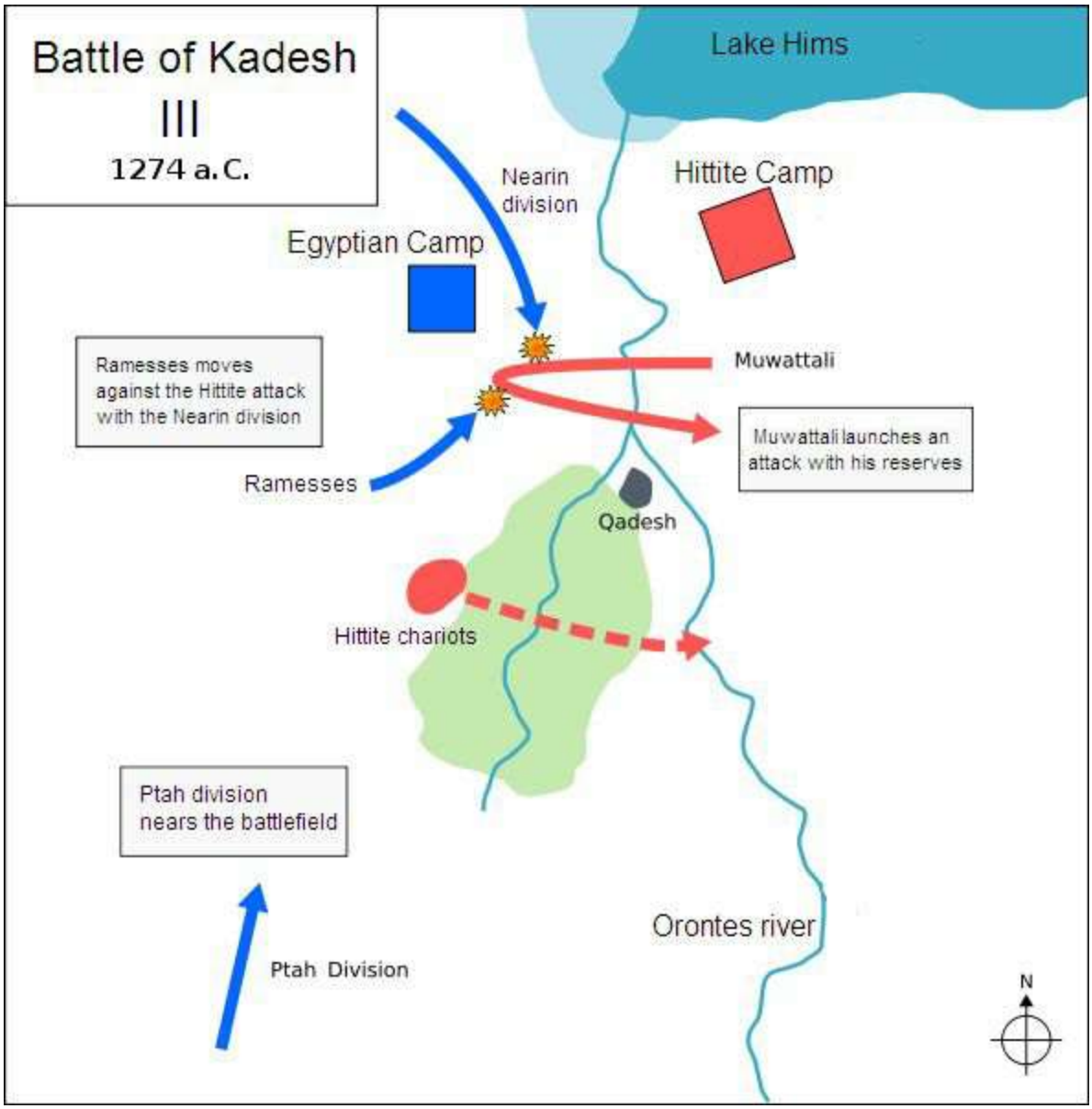
“When they had been brought before Pharaoh, His Majesty asked, 'Who are you?' They replied 'We belong to the king of Hatti. He has sent us to spy on you.' Then His Majesty said to them, 'Where is he, the enemy from Hatti? I had heard that he was in the land of Khaleb, north of .' They of Tunip replied to His Majesty, 'Lo, the king of Hatti has already arrived, together with the many countries who are supporting him... They are armed with their infantry and their chariots. They have their weapons of war at the ready. They are more numerous than the grains of sand on the beach. Behold, they stand equipped and ready for battle behind the old city of Kadesh.'”

This is an ancient depiction of the Egyptians torturing the spies for information.

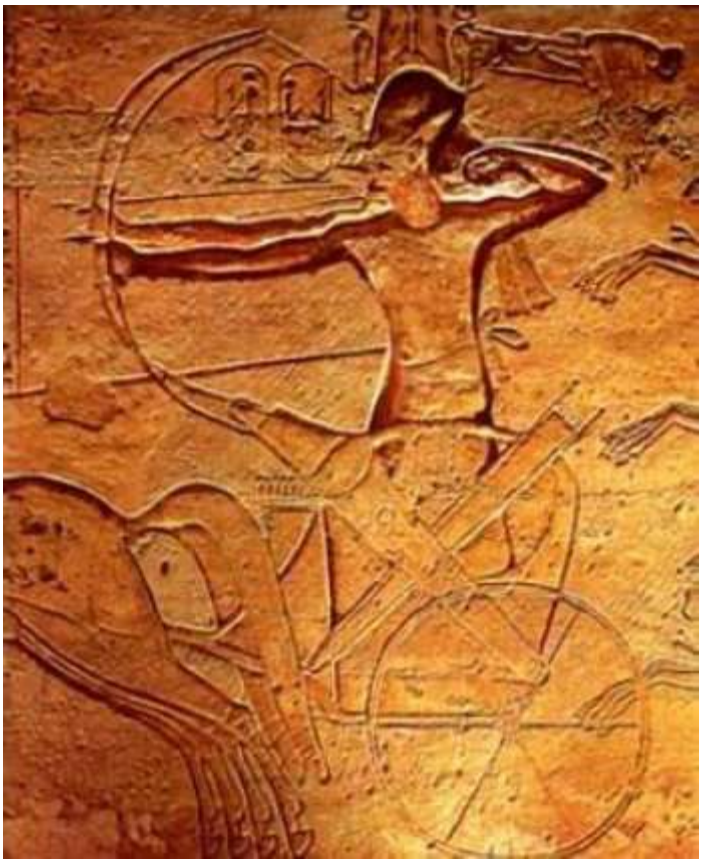
After receiving that information, Ramesses attempted to quickly marshal his forces to Kadesh, but in the process he created a gap between the different divisions of his army in his haste. The trap was sprung by the Hittite forces just outside Kadesh, and the Ra division of his army was hit by an initial charge from Hittite chariots and routed before the battle had even properly begun.


Battle of Kadesh
1274 a.C.
Lake Hims
Hittite Camp
Egyptian Camp
Amun division
The Hittite force attacks the Egyptian camp
Qadesh
Ra is surprised and dispersed
Ra division
Hittite chariots cross the river and attack the Ra division
Orontes river
Ptah division
N


Battle of Kadesh
II
1274 a.C.
Lake Hims
Hittite Camp
Egyptian Camp
Muwattali leads a sortie to aid his retreating forces
Ra
Qadesh
Ramses leads his chariots to assault the Egyptian camp
The Hittites flee with heavy losses
Orontes river
N



Surrounded and swiftly outnumbered, most of the Egyptian soldiers were killed in the ensuing chaos, and the Pharaoh himself was forced into retreating in order simply to survive. What is known of the rest of the battle is that Ramesses II rallied his forces, fought on through the battlefield in order to evade capture and death, and managed to get away with only with a fraction of his troops. The majority of his army was slain on the field of battle that he left behind him.



A relief inside Ramesses II’s Abu Simbel temple that depicts him firing arrows from a chariot during the Battle of Kadesh.

The Battle of Kadesh was a devastating ambush, a strategic defeat, and the end of the pharaoh’s campaign of conquest. The hopes Ramesses II had held for claiming for Egypt both the city and territory around Kadesh were lost, but Ramesses II had survived, and when he returned to Egypt, he set out to test the adage that history is written by the winners. Ramesses II erected monuments, commissioned inscriptions, and oversaw the decoration of reliefs all proclaiming the Battle of Kadesh as a major victory. His personal heroism and skill as a warrior were praised on inscriptions at such locations as Abydos, the Ramesseum, Karnak, Luxor and Abu Simbel. Ramesses had personal details inscribed that claimed, "No officer was with me, no charioteer, no soldier of the army, no shield-bearer..." and “I was before them like Seth in his monument. I found the mass of chariots in whose midst I was, scattering them before my horses..." In Luxor, it was written, “His majesty slaughtered the armed forces of the Hittites in their entirety, their great rulers and all their brothers ... their infantry and chariot troops fell prostrate, one on

top of the other. His majesty killed them ... and they lay stretched out in front of their horses. But his majesty was alone, nobody accompanied him...” If the inscriptions were to be believed, the great warrior had singlehandedly ensured his own survival, even with all the odds stacked against him. Ramesses II successfully used propaganda inscribed onto the monuments and in the public places of Egypt to ensure that the people he ruled would deem him a victorious leader, even when he himself was faced with defeat.

The scale of the battle and the tactics used reveal that Bronze Age armies were as sophisticated as many military operations from later periods in history. The number of men in both armies totaled around 40,000, which were probably divided roughly equally between Egyptian and Hittite. One of the more interesting aspects of the Kadesh texts details how the Egyptian army was divided into four divisions (Breasted 2001, 127). The four divisions were named for important gods of the Egyptian New Kingdom: Seth, Re, Ptah, and Amun. The Amun division was the strike force and led personally by the pharaoh (Breasted 2001, 128-29). It is unknown if the Hittite army was also divided into divisions, but one can assume that with an army of around 20,000 men, it would have been logical to do so.

Although the Battle of Kadesh texts are written from and to an Egyptian audience and therefore painted a much more heroic picture of the Egyptian king Ramesses II (ca. 1290-1224 BCE) than was really the case, details of Hittite military maneuvers can be gleaned from the documents.

According to the texts, Ramesses II led the Amun division far ahead of the other three Egyptian divisions in order to quickly capture the town of Kadesh. Perhaps his own arrogance and hubris was to blame for the action, or maybe he honestly thought the town was abandoned, but he and the Amun division learned when they arrived that the Hittite army was already there. The text states:

> “Lo, while his majesty sat talking with the princes, the vanquished chief of Hatti came, and the numerous countries, which were with him. They crossed over the channel on the south of Kadesh, and charged into the army of his majesty while they were marching, and not expecting it. Then the infantry and chariotry of his majesty retreated before them, northward to the

> place where his majesty was. Lo, the foes of the vanquished chief of Hatti surrounded the bodyguard of his majesty, who were by his side.
>
> When his majesty saw them, he was enraged against them, like his father, Montu, lord of Thebes. He seized the adornments of battle, and arrayed himself in his coat of mail. He was like Baal in his hour. Then he betook himself to his horses, and led quickly on, being alone by himself. He charged into the foes of the vanquished chief of Hatti, and the numerous countries which were with him. His majesty was like Seth, the great in strength, smiting and slaying among them; his majesty hurled them headlong, one upon another into the water of the Orontes." (Breasted 2001, 146-47)

Beyond the bluster and hyperbole on the part of the Egyptian king, two facts are revealed: the Hittite forces were already in the city and Ramesses' reinforcements were far behind. The inscriptions reveal that in the next phase of the battle, the Hittites surrounded the Egyptian king, who was only saved by Levantine reinforcements from the vassal city of Amor. The text reads, "The arrival of the recruits of Pharaoh, life, prosperity, health, from the land of Amor. They found that the force of the vanquished chief of Hatti had surrounded the camp of his majesty on its western side. His majesty had been camping alone, no army with him, [awaiting the] arrival of his [officers] and his army and the division with which Pharaoh, life, prosperity, health, was, had not finished setting up camp. Now the division of Re and the division of Ptah were on the march; they had not (yet) arrived, and their officers were in the [forest] of Bewey. Then the recruits cut off the foe belonging to the vanquished chief of Hatti, while they (the foe) were entering the camp, and Pharaoh's officers slew them; they left not a single survivor among them." (Breasted 2001, 155).

Of course, the truth was that the battle allowed Muwatalli II to consolidate Hittite power in the Damascus region (Kuhrt 2010, 1:258). Furthermore, the Hittite king was also able to retake Hattusa and the city of Nerik, the cult center of the important Storm god, from the Gasga people (Kuhrt 2010, 1:258).

However, the strength and vitality of Muwatalli II's reign ultimately gave way to another brief period of unrest in the Hittite kingdom. Muwatalli II was succeeded by Mursili III (1285-1275 BCE), whose brief rule was usurped by his uncle, Hattusili III (1275-1245 BCE). Texts reveal that although Hattusili III was not in the line of succession and therefore a pretender to the throne, he usurped and exiled his nephew because he feared for his life (Kuhrt 2010, 1:249). Shortly after exiling his nephew, Mursili III lost most of the lands in western Anatolia that his predecessors worked so hard to acquire (Macqueen 2003, 49), and control over the southeastern trade routes to Mesopotamia were also tenuous until the new Hittite king decided to follow a foreign policy path that was initiated by Suppiluliuma I: diplomacy.

Hattusili III quickly made an alliance with Babylon and then made overtures to Egypt, which was still ruled by the enduring Ramesses II (Macqueen 2003, 50). The Hittites and Egyptians eventually agreed to a peace treaty and alliance, which was sealed with a diplomatic marriage, because the two kingdoms saw a mutual enemy in the growing power of the Assyrian kingdom in northern Mesopotamia (Kuhrt 2010, 1:263). The alliance between the Hittites and Egyptians was commemorated in inscriptions and reliefs in Egypt in the Karnak Temple and demonstrates the importance of diplomatic marriages in the region during Bronze Age. The text first articulates the friendship and amity between the two kings: "Behold then, Hattusili, the great chief of Hatti, is in treaty relation with Usermare-Setepenre (Ramesses II), the great ruler of Egypt, beginning with this day, in order to bring about good peace and good brotherhood between us forever, while he is in brotherhood with me, his is in peace with me; and I am in brotherhood with him, and I am in peace with him, forever. Since Muwatalli, the great chief of Hatti, my brother, succumbed to his fate, and Hattusili sat as great chief of Hatti upon the throne of his father, behold, I am together with Ramesses-Meriamun, the great ruler of Egypt, and he is [with me in] our peace and our brotherhood. It is better than the former peace and brotherhood which were in the land." (Breasted 2001, 167-68).

After the formalities and niceties of the first part of the inscription, details are then related that pertain to an actual military alliance between Hatti and Egypt. The text reads, "If another enemy come against the lands of Usermare-Setep-enre (Ramesses II), the great ruler of Egypt, and he shall send to the

great chief of Kheta, saying: ‘Come with me as reinforcement against him,’ the great chief of Hatti shall [come], and the great chief of Hatti shall slay his enemy. But if it be not the desire of the great chief of Hatti to come, he shall send his infantry and his chariotry, and shall slay his enemy.” (Breasted 2001, 169).

The alliance between the Hittites and Egyptians was then sealed in much the same way that many alliances were at the time: a diplomatic marriage. Since the Egyptians refused to marry their women to foreign kings, it was Ramesses II who married a Hittite princess in a union that would tie the two royal houses together. The text states, “The daughter of the great chief of Hatti marched in [front] of the army . . . of his majesty in following her. They were mingled with foot and horse of Hatti; they were warriors as well as regulars; they ate and they drank [not] fighting face to face . . . between them, after the manner of the god himself, King Ramesses (II). The great chiefs of every land came; they were bowed down, turning their back in fear, when they saw [his majesty; the chief of] Hatti [came] among them, [to seek the favor] of King Ramesses (II).” (Breasted 2001, 185-86).

Although the Hittites and Egyptians never activated the alliance in defense of one another, the two kingdoms never again engaged each other in war either. This helped bring about a long period of time marked by the “Great Powers.” For about a 500 year period, from the middle to the later second millennium BCE, the most powerful kingdoms of the ancient Near East developed a system that interconnected people over thousands of miles through economic and diplomatic activity. The great powers of the ancient Near East consisted of Babylon, Hatti, Egypt, Mittani, and after Mittani’s collapse in the mid-14th century, Assyria (van de Mieroop 2007, 129). The kings of the great powers, and the rulers of numerous lesser powers, would communicate with each other through documents that were written in the cuneiform script in the Akkadian language, the lingua franca of the Bronze Age (Kuhrt 2010, 1:232).

Under the Great Powers system a new international elite class emerged whose members probably had more in common with each other than with the subjects of their own kingdoms (van de Mieroop 2007, 144). A letter from Suppiluliuma I to the Egyptian king Akhenaten (ca. 1364-1347 BCE)

demonstrates how the Hittite king respected his contemporary, even if they were rivals. The text reads, “I herewith send you as your greeting gift: 1 silver rhyton, a stag, 5 minas its weight; 1 silver rhyton, a young ram, 3 minas its weight; 2 silver disks, 10 minas their weight, as 2 large nikiptu-trees.” (Cochavi-Rainey 1999, 174).

The letter from the Hittite to the Egyptian king is then juxtaposed with a letter Suppiluliuma I wrote to the Levantine king of Ugarit, who was clearly in an inferior: “Niqmaddu, king of Ugarit, saying ‘You are not hostile with us against his majesty!’ But Niqmaddu (for his part) refused to become hostile to the Sun and the Sun, the great king, noted the loyalty of Niqamaddu and now Suppiluliuma, the great king, the king of the land of Hatti has verily made a treaty with Niqmaddu, king of the land of Ugarit, saying: ‘The tribute to the Sun, the great king, your lord, is 12 minas and 20 shekels of gold (20 large [shekels]), 1 cup of cold, a mina in weight, as the primary tribute, 4 linen garments, 1 large linen garment, 500 shekels of blue-purple wool, 500 shekels of red-purple wool for the Sun, the great king, his lord.” (Cochavi-Rainey 1999, 187)

For the most part, the system worked as the great states rarely faced each other in war directly; but the Levant was the stomping grounds for numerous proxy wars between the constituent members (van de Mieroop 2007, 133-34). The Egyptians, Hittites, and Babylonians fought border battles with each other over colonies, but they also traded rare commodities and sometimes royal princesses. Nonetheless, despite Hatti’s membership in the Great Powers club, it was not enough to stop the waning power of the Hittite kingdom. The Hittite king Tudhaliya IV (ca. 1245-1215 BCE) embarked on an ambitious program to rebuild the kingdom, but the growing juggernaut of Assyria slowly ate away at Hittite control in the Levant (Kuhrt 2010, 1:265).

Although the expansion of the Assyrian state during the era was fairly gradual, the rule of Ashur-ubalit I (ca. 1365-1330) is generally viewed as starting the Assyrian expansion (Kuhrt 2010, 1:351). Ashur-ubalit I was able to take advantage of troubles outside the Assyrian kingdom by annexing territories to Assyria’s east after the Hittites attacked the kingdom of the Mitanni (van de Mieroop 2007, 181), and by the rule of the Assyrian king

Tukulti-Ninurta I (ca. 1243-1207), the Assyrians had consumed the Mitanni kingdom east of the Euphrates River and were well on the way to wiping out that entire kingdom (van de Mieroop 2007, 182).

The late second millennium BC was a period of unrest in the Near East, especially as the Bronze Age was swept away and replaced by the Iron Age. The transition to the Iron Age proved to be especially violent, and it brought about the end of the Great Powers Club. A mysterious coalition of warrior tribes known collectively as the Sea Peoples ravaged the coastal kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean, and they destroyed the kingdoms of Ugarit and Hatti and nearly destroyed Egypt as well (Sandars 1987, 105-155).

Since they were located further inland from the Mediterranean coast, the Assyrians did not suffer as much from the Sea Peoples attacks, but that empire was not totally immune to the general situation either. A group of Semitic speaking people, known as the Arameans, began to attack and ravage numerous Mesopotamian cities around this same time (Haywood 2005, 41). The Aramean raids became the primary focus of Tiglath-pileser's reign, a fact mentioned in the historical annals: "With the help of Assur, my lord, I led forth my chariots and warriors and went into the desert. Into the midst of the Ahlami, Arameans, enemies of Assur, my lord, I marched. The country from Suhi to the city of Carchemish, in the land of Hatti, I raided in one day. I slew their troops; their spoil, their goods and their possessions in countless numbers I carried away. The rest of their forces, which had fled from before the terrible weapons of Assur, my lord, and had crossed over the Euphrates – in pursuit of them I crossed the Euphrates in vessels made of skins. Six of their cities, which lay at the foot of the mountain of Beshri, I captured, I burned with fire, I laid (them) waste, I destroyed (them). Their spoil, their goods and their possessions I carried away to my city Assur." (Luckenbill 1989, 1:83).

However, despite Tiglath-pileser's best efforts, the Aramean hordes eventually reduced the Assyrian Empire to its original heartland around Ashur by 1050 BCE (van de Mieroop 2007, 182). The Arameans and the general collapse of the period may have reduced the land the Assyrians held, but Robert Drews has argued that their use of infantry helped them survive the collapse, whereas others, such as the Hittites, did not (Drews 1993, 140).

The Historians' History of the World described Assyrian infantry: "The spear of the Assyrian footman was short, scarcely exceeding the height of a man; that of the horseman appears to have been considerably longer… The shaft was probably of some strong wood, and did not consist of a reed, like that of the modern Arab lance."

Chapter 5: Hittite Literature and Historiography

The scope of Hittite literature, like that of most of their Near Eastern contemporaries, included mythology, administrative documents, and historical texts. When the first catalog of Hittite texts was compiled in 1971, it contained around 25,000 extant texts, but that is believed to only represent about 15% of the original archives (Kuhrt 2010, 1:232). The majority of the texts were discovered in the Great Temple of Hattusa, and a number were also recovered in the ruins of the royal citadel (Kuhrt 2010, 1:232).

Although the number of texts is many and diverse in their literary genres, the natures of the texts present some inherent problems to modern scholars in terms of reconstructing Hittite chronology, some of which have already been briefly discussed above. Most of the texts were written in the last 100 years of Hattusa's existence, which means that most of the historical annals are copies of earlier records (van de Mieroop 2007, 157). Also, many of the works that are considered "literature" in the modern sense, such as fictional tales, are also copies from earlier Mesopotamian texts (Macqueen 2003, 149).

In terms of epics, or myth cycles, the Hittites carried on Mesopotamian traditions by copying tales such as "The Epic of Gilgamesh" in their scribal schools, albeit with a notable Hittite flavor. Hittite scribes copied the Mesopotamian tales in Akkadian cuneiform but also Hittite and Hurrian, and they would change some of the settings from southern Mesopotamia to northern Mesopotamia, which was a region more familiar to the Hittites (Macqueen 2003, 149). Although the Hittites recorded aspects of their religion in writing – mainly cult rituals and prayers, one of which was discussed above – they wrote down few true epic native myths (Macqueen 2003, 151).

A large number of the extant Hittite documents are administrative in nature and although perhaps not as exciting to read as the mythological or historical texts, they tell modern historians much about the Hittite government and society in general. Many of these administrative documents concern the proper behavior of palace and temple servants, priests, and soldiers. One particular document that relates the daily life of temple servants depicts a regimented routine with an emphasis on purity, both spiritually and

physically, with severe penalties for those who fail to follow the rules. The text reads: “Furthermore, let those who prepare the daily loaves be clean. Let them be bathed (and) groomed, let their (body) hair and nails be removed. Let them be clothed in clean dresses. [While unclean], let them not prepare (the loaves); let those who are [agreeable] to the god’s soul and person prepare them. The bakers’ house in which they prepare them – let that be swept (and) scrubbed. Furthermore, let a pig or a dog not stay at the door of the place where the loaves are broken. Are the minds of men and of the gods generally different? No! . . . Further: You who are temple officials, be very careful with respect to the precinct. At nightfall promptly go to be in (the temple); eat (and) drink, and if the desire for a woman [overcome]es anyone, let him sleep with a woman. But as long as […] let him stay and let e[very one] promptly come up to spend the night in the temple. Whoever is a temple official, all high priests, minor priests, “anointed” or whoever else is allowed to cross the threshold of the gods, let (them) not fail to spend the night in the temple one by one. . . Further: Be very careful with the matter of fire. If there is a festival in the temple, guard the fire carefully. When night falls, quench well with water whatever fire remains on the hearth. But if there is any flame in isolated spots and (also) dry wood, (if) he who is to quench it becomes criminally negligent in the temple – even if only the temple is destroyed, but Hattusa and the king’s property is not destroyed – he who commits the crime will perish together with his descendants.” (Pritchard 1992, 207-9)

Hittite administrative documents remain an important part of modern scholarship, but perhaps the most important genre of Hittite literature, in ancient as well as modern times, consist of historiographical/historical texts. Although the Hittites kept excellent annals of the deeds of their kings, they never numbered the numerous same named kings, which is a more modern convention (van de Mieroop 2007, 156). Hittite historical texts also never give the date or length of a king’s reign, which has made it tough to reach a consensus regarding the precise length of some kings’ reigns. For example, the length of Suppiluliuma I’s rule is placed at between 22-40 years depending upon the expert (van de Mieroop 2007, 156). The Hittites also left no true “king-list” as their contemporaries did in Babylon, Egypt, and Assyria (Kuhrt 2010, 1:229). The king-list of the above mentioned peoples were quite simple and usually consisted of a proper chronological ordering of the kings,

along with the length of their reigns. These empires also occasionally added additional information about their rulers in documents called annals, and while they didn't keep king-lists, the Hittites were adept at recording the annals of their kings, beginning in the Old Kingdom when Hattusili I left a bilingual Hittite-Akkadian cuneiform account of his military endeavors (van de Mieroop 2007, 157). Some historians believe that the Hittite historiographical tradition may have influenced the Assyrians to write their detailed royal annals, which provides the basis for most modern chronologies of the first millennium BCE in the Near East (van de Mieroop 2007, 157).

Chapter 6: Hittite Myth and Theology

The Hittite kings were truly proud of their conquests, but in order to understand the reasons for their militant character, it's necessary to look to their religion. Unfortunately, knowledge of Hittite religion is limited due to the nature of the extant texts; while a fairly solid view of Hittite religion can be gleaned from the variety of texts that have survived, no known text relates a detailed cosmological origin, so scholars are left with many blanks in that respect (Beckman 1989, 98).

The Hittites followed a religion that combined both Indo-European and non-Indo-European theological elements. At the center of the religion were the Storm-god and his consort, the Sun-goddess (Macqueen 2003, 111), and the Storm-god, who was only referred to as such in the extant texts and never by a specific name, was derived from the Hittites' Indo-European origins (Beckmen 1989, 99). Elemental and storm deities were common throughout the religions of many different Indo-European peoples, including Thor, the Norse god of thunder, Zeus, the supreme god of the Greeks who was associated with lightning, and Indra, the Aryan god of war also associated with storms. This all points to a similar theological origin having come somewhere from the Indo-European homeland.

Conversely, the Sun-goddess is believed to have been a native, non-Indo-European deity who the Hittites accepted when they entered Anatolia (Macqueen 2003, 111). Although solar gods were common among ancient Indo-European peoples – Apollo of the Greeks, Sol of the Romans, and Agni of the Aryans are just three examples – the Hittite solar goddess is notably different in that it was a female (Macqueen 2003, 111). The importance of the Sun-goddess, who was also associated with fertility, continued throughout Hittite history and beyond as she evolved into the goddess known as Cybele during the Greco-Roman period (Beckman 1989, 99).

Although Hittite religion, being partly Indo-European, may have had some different theological and historical origins than its contemporaries in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Levant, it shared one feature that was paramount in all of the religion of the ancient Near East: the importance of cult and ritual. The central role that cult and ritual played in Hittite religion can be understood as

a symbiotic relationship that the divine and man had with each other. The gods were dependent on the offerings made by priests, who in turn could only live in a stable world that the gods and goddesses provided (Beckman 1989, 100).

Engraving depicting the deity Kubaba holding a pomegranate

The rituals were many and varied and usually involved festivals that occurred annually on the Hittite calendar (Macqueen 2003, 120), but the Hittites diverged from the ritual practices of their ancient Near Eastern neighbors by placing a heavy emphasis on the idea of contamination. The Hittites believed that evil spirits lurked around every corner and sought to pollute the living spiritually and physically, and that death carried the greatest risk of pollution to those who touched the corpse (Kuhrt 2010, 1:277).

The idea of pollution caused by a corpse was not present in the theologies of any of the Hittites' Near Eastern contemporaries, and in fact was antithetical to the Egyptian philosophy towards the corpse, which held that a body needed to be scientifically preserved in order to ensure a proper afterlife. As such, some believe that the Hittite theological view of the pollution of the corpse may be another ancient Indo-European theological holdover. Many ancient Indo-Europeans – most notably the Romans, Aryans, and Vikings – believed that a corpse was not only unclean but that it also held the soul of the dead and therefore needed to be released through fire. The ancient Persians also believed that corpses were unclean vessels that held the soul of the deceased, but instead of cremating their dead – to them fire was sacred and could not touch any impurities – they exposed the corpse (Boyce 2001, 44).

The proper rituals were carried out by the priests, and the highest of all priests was the Hittite king. Hittite religious rituals were carried out throughout many Anatolian towns, but those of the major cults, such as the Storm-god and Sun-goddess, were primarily done in the capital of Hattusa (Kuhrt 2010, 1:277). The king fulfilled two roles in the spiritual/theological world of the Hittites by serving as high-priest and hero. In the role of hero, the living king led his troops into war and served as a conduit to the great Hittite kings of the past. The living king also acted as the high priest of the religion, and while not viewed as a god the way the Egyptians saw their king, he was believed to attain divinity upon his death (Kuhrt 2010, 1:277). The primary religious duties of the living king were to visit the numerous shrines and temples within Anatolia and officiate over festivals, as well as to maintain a high level of purity as discussed above (Macqueen 2003, 116). The king's religious duties were usually very public for the most part; private prayer, although important, played a subordinate position to that of temple

rituals (Macqueen 2003, 116).

Although the Hittites did not believe their living kings were divine, they thought that kingship was divinely inspired. One particularly lurid Hittite myth describes how Anus, the divine king of heaven, defeated his enemy Kumbaris in a particularly humiliating way. The text reads:

> "Nine in number were the years that Alalus was king in heaven. In the ninth year Anus gave battle to Alalus and he vanquished Alalus. He fled before him and went down to the dark earth. Down he went to the dark earth, but Anus took his eat upon the throne. (As long as) Anus was seated upon the throne, the mighty Kumarbis would give him his food. He would sink at his feet and set the drinking cup in his hand.
>
> Nine in number were the years that Anus was king in heaven. In the ninth year Anus gave battle to Kumarbis and like Alalus Kumarbis gave battle to Anus. (When) he could no longer withstand Kumarbis eyes, (he) Anus, he struggled forth from the hands of Kumarbis. He fled, (he) Auns; (like) a bird he moved in the sky. After him rushed Kumarbis, seized (him) Anus, by his feet and dragged him down from the sky.
>
> He (Kumarbis) bit his 'knees' and his manhood went down into his inside. When it lodged there, (and) when Kumarbis had swallowed Anus' manhood, Kumarbis he began to speak: 'Thou rejoices over thine inside, because thou hast swallowed my manhood.
>
> 'Rejoice not over thine inside! In thine inside I have planted a heavy burden. Firstly I have impregnated thee with the noble Storm-god. Secondly I have impregnated thee with the river Aranzahas, not to be endured. Thirdly I have impregnated thee with the noble Tasmisus. Three dreadful gods have I planted in thy belly as seed.'" (Pritchard 1992, 120).

The king's association with the Storm-god coincided with the queen's linking to the Sun-goddess (Beckman 1989, 101). In Hattusa, all of the rituals were carried out in the primary temple complex, which was situated in a

prominent position in the lower city beneath the royal palace (Macqueen 2003, 116). The ruins of Hattusa's temple complex are some of the best preserved archaeological finds of the Hittite culture, which has helped historians discover important information about their religion. The temple was entered through an elaborate, colossal gateway that was designed along the characteristic Hittite architectural style, and a courtyard stood between the entrance and the innermost sections of the temple. A small building stood on the far side of the courtyard, which served as a ritual cleansing house, and beyond that were the shrines of the Storm-god and Sun-goddess. The shrines were made of granite, unlike the limestone that comprised the rest of the temple, and they housed the divine statues of the deities (Macqueen 2003, 119). The housing of divine images in the most sacred precincts of temples was a practice common to most peoples of the ancient Near East, as the deities were believed to at least partly reside in the images.

Inside the temple, festivals from the Hittite calendar took place, with the most important being the New Year's festival, which was held for the Storm-god (Beckman 1989, 103). A Hittite text reveals part of what the festival entailed:

> "These are the words of Kellas, the 'anointed' of the Storm-god of Nerik. What follows is the cult legend of the Purulli Festival of the Storm-god of Heaven, (the version of which) they no longer tell:
>
> May the land flourish (and) prosper! May the land be (well) protected! If it flourishes (and) prospers, they will celebrate the Purulli Festival.
>
> The Storm-god and the Dragon Illuyankas came to grips in Kiskilussa, the Dragon Illuyankas vanquished the Storm-god.
>
> The Storm-god besought all the gods: 'Come ye to my aid! Let Inaras prepare a celebration!" (Pritchard 1992, 125).

Chapter 7: The Collapse of the Hittite Empire

The Hittite religion was truly complex and by all accounts they were pious people, but their piety and gods would not be enough to keep their empire from collapsing. Although the final coup de grace leveled on the Hittite empire may have come in the form of foreign invaders, the disintegration was slow and began within the confines of Anatolia. During the reign of the last Hittite king, Suppiluliuma II (ca. 1207-? BCE), internal discord made the Hittite state weak, even as Suppiluliuma II set out to restore internal stability in Hatti and also to devote resources to the mortuary shrine of his father and other religious establishments (Bryce 2007, 328).

However, despite the Hittite king's best efforts, supply routes in the eastern Mediterranean were threatened, which forced the last Hittite king to resort to an extremely rare military move: naval warfare. Most of the Hittite sea battles began during the reign of Tudhaliya IV (ca. 1227-1209 BCE) and took place off the coast of Alasiya (Cyprus), all with limited success (Bryce 2007, 332). The internal situation became so bad in Hatti that there was apparently a food shortage, and the once proud Hittites were forced to accept an emergency grain shipment from their Egyptian allies. A text from the Karnak Temple dated to the reign of the Egyptian king Merenptah (ca. 1213-1203 BCE) reads, "They spend their time going about the land, fighting, to fill their bodies daily. They come to the land of Egypt, to seek the necessities of their mouths; their desire is . . . my bringing them like netted fish on their bellies. Their chief is like a dog, a man of [boasting], without courage; he does not abide . . . bringing an end the Pedetishew, whom I caused to take grain in ships, to keep alive that land of Hatti." (Breasted 2001, 244).

Some experts believe that the Hittites' own efficiency in military matters was their ultimate undoing. Bryce argues that the forced removals and resettlements of rebellious populations helped contribute to a situation that sent groups of people, both large and small, across the region and thus disrupted supply lines and trade networks (Bryce 2007, 339). The population movements, which began as a trickle in the late 13th century BCE, eventually coalesced into a tsunami known today as the Sea Peoples. This helped bring down the old Bronze Age system and the "Great Powers" club mentioned earlier, and it ushered in the Iron Age (Sandars 1987).

Although there is still plenty of debate over the nature of the Sea Peoples and the extent they played in the collapse of the Mediterranean Bronze Age system, none dispute that the enigmatic wandering peoples did extensive damage to trade routes and kingdoms in the region, and no Bronze Age kingdom suffered more than the Hittites. The Sea Peoples followed an east to west trajectory as they headed towards Hatti, first destroying the northwest Anatolian trade routes and the Hittites' rival, Arzawa, with them (Macqueen 2003, 51).

Some historians believe that the Hittites saw the writing on the wall and abandoned Hattusa before the Sea Peoples arrived. Under this hypothesis, advocated by J. Seeher, the Hittite elite evacuated Hattusa before the vanguard of the Sea Peoples, who thus found a desolate city that they then put to the torch (Bryce 2007, 345). Seeher's theory is interesting and may be true, but the fundamental fact remains that the Hittite capital was destroyed and the empire along with it. When the smoke cleared, Hatti was no longer standing, and excavations at Hattusa have revealed signs of utter destruction to the point that the site was completely abandoned for centuries (Sandars 1987, 140).

Despite the Sea Peoples' utter destruction of the Hittite Empire, the Hittite name would live on for a few more hundred years. Although the Hittite capital and empire may have been destroyed, the memory of the great Anatolian culture lived on and inspired later generations of rulers in the ancient Near East. Some of the surviving elites who fled Hattusa, as Seeher has argued, probably ended up in the northern Levant cities of Carchaemish and Emar (Bryce 2007, 350). These cities, which were once vassal states of the Hittite Empire, carried on the Hittite name and some aspects of Hittite culture, but they were a mere shadow of the Hittites of the past. That said, these Levantine Hittites, referred to by modern scholars as "neo-Hittites," created a new script known as "hieroglyphic Hittite" (Macqueen 2003, 24). The language of hieroglyphic Hittite, like true Hittite, was Indo-European, but it was written in a script that used a pictorial type script unlike the cuneiform script employed in classic Hittite (Macqueen 2003, 24).

Most scholars believe that the neo-Hittite culture was essentially a combination of the remnants of the Hittite elites along with the local

Levantine elite class (Macqueen 2003, 155). The most influential people in the region during the first millennium BCE – the Assyrians, Urartians, and Hebrews – referred to the local Syrian rulers as “Kings of the Hittites” (Bryce 2007, 351). The first mention of the Hittites in the Bible also came during this period, which was in a context that was a far cry from the days of Suppiluliuma II. The Bible said, “And all the cities of store that Solomon had, and cities for his chariots, and cities for his horsemen, and that which Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion. And all the people that were left of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, which were not of the children of Israel, their children that were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy, upon those did Solomon levy a tribute of bondservice to this day.” (1 Kings 9:19-21).

Although the neo-Hittites were able to carry on the original language of the Hittite to a certain extent, they were unable to come close to matching the territorial or military power of their ancestors because they were forced to contend with the greatest military power that the ancient Near East had ever seen: the Assyrian empire. By the reign of the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I (1114-1076 BCE), the Assyrians had extended their influence into the former homeland of the Hittites, and the well-documented and detailed Assyrian annals mention the numerous lands that were subdued by the Assyrian war machine. Among the lands the Assyrians conquered was Hatti, as it was still called by the Assyrians. The annal of Tiglath-Pileser I states, “I subdued the land of the Shubari, with its haughty and insubmissive (people) and upon the land of Alzi, and the land of Purukuzzi, which had withheld their tribute and tax, I laid the heavy yoke of my sovereignty, (and I ordered) that they should bring tribute and tax, year by year, to my city Assur, into my presence. Through my own valor, and because Assur, the lord, had put into my hand a mighty weapon which subdues the insubmissive, and commanded me to extend the frontiers of his land: four thousand (men of) Kaski and of Urumi, soldiers of the land of Hatti, who were in revolt and had seized the cities of the land of Shubarti, by their won strength, - cities which were subject to Asur, my lord, - they heard of my coming against the land of Shubarti, the brilliance of my valor overwhelmed them, they were afraid to fight (so) they embraced my feet.” (Luckenbill 1989, 77).

Thus, the land of Hatti would never regain the independence or status that it enjoyed during the Hittite Empire. With the Assyrians growing in power in northern Mesopotamia and extending their influence into Anatolia, the neo-Hittites were forced to relegate their activities to the Levant.

As the Bible suggests, the neo-Hittites were clearly in an inferior position to the Israelites since they were forced to pay tribute to the same people who once paid tribute to Hattusa. However, while the neo-Hittites may have been relegated to an inferior political position in the first millennium BCE, another passage from 2 Kings reveals that they may not have lost their zeal for warfare. The passage states, "And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there. For the lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us." (2 Kings 7:5-6).

Ultimately, the role that the neo-Hittites played in the affairs of Israel was probably minimal, given that there are not many more verses in the Bible that mention them, and any revival that the neo-Hittites hoped to make of the grand old empire was finally brought to an end when the Assyrians destroyed the state of Uratu in 743 BCE. From that point forward, the Levant, and most of the Near East, became part of the vast and growing Assyrian Empire.

Bibliography

Anthony, David W. 2007. The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Beckman, Gary. 1989. "The Religion of the Hittites." Biblical Archaeologist 52: 98-108.

Boyce, Mary. 2001. Zoroastrians: Their religious beliefs and practices. London: Routledge.

Breasted, James Henry, ed. and trans. 2001. Ancient Records of Egypt. Vol. 3, The Nineteenth Dynasty. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Bryce, Trevor B. 2007. The Kingdom of the Hittites. New ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 1989. “Some Observations on the Chronology of Šuppiluliuma’s Reign.” Anatolian Studies 39: 19-30.

Cochavi-Rainey, Zipora, trans and ed. 1999. Royal Gifts in the Late Bronze Age Fourteenth to Thirteenth Centuries B.C.E.: Selected Texts Recording Gifts to Royal Personages. Jerusalem: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press.

Faulkner, Richard O. 1999. A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian. Oxford: Griffith Institute.

Goedicke, Hans. 1984. “The Canaanite Illness.” Studien zur altägyptische Kultur 11: 91-105.

Grayson, A. Kirk, ed. 2000. Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns.

Kuhrt, Amélie. 2010. The Ancient Near East: c. 3000-330 BCE. 2 vols. London: Routledge.

Lichtheim, Miriam, ed. 1976. Ancient Egyptian Literature. Vol. 2, The New Kingdom. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Liverani, Mario. 1973. “Memorandum on the Approach to Historiographical Texts.” Orientalia 42: 178-194.

Luckenbill, Daniel David, ed. and trans. 1989. Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia. 2 vols. London: Histories and Mysteries of Man.

Macqueen, J.G. 2003. The Hittites and Their Contemporaries in Asia Minor. London: Thames and Hudson.

Mieroop, Marc van de. 2007. A History of the Ancient Near East: ca. 3000-323 BCE. 2nd ed. London: Blackwell.

Moran, William L., ed. and trans. 1992. The Amarna Letters. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Pritchard, James B., ed. 1992. Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the

Old Testament. 3rd ed. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Sandars, Nancy. 1987. The Sea Peoples: Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean, 1250-1150 BCE. Rev. ed. London: Thames and Hudson.

Schulman, Alan R. 1979. “Diplomatic Marriage in the Egyptian New Kingdom.” Journal of Near Eastern Studies 38: 177-193

———. 1978. “Ankhesenamun, Nofretity, and the Amka Affair.” Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt 15: 43-48.

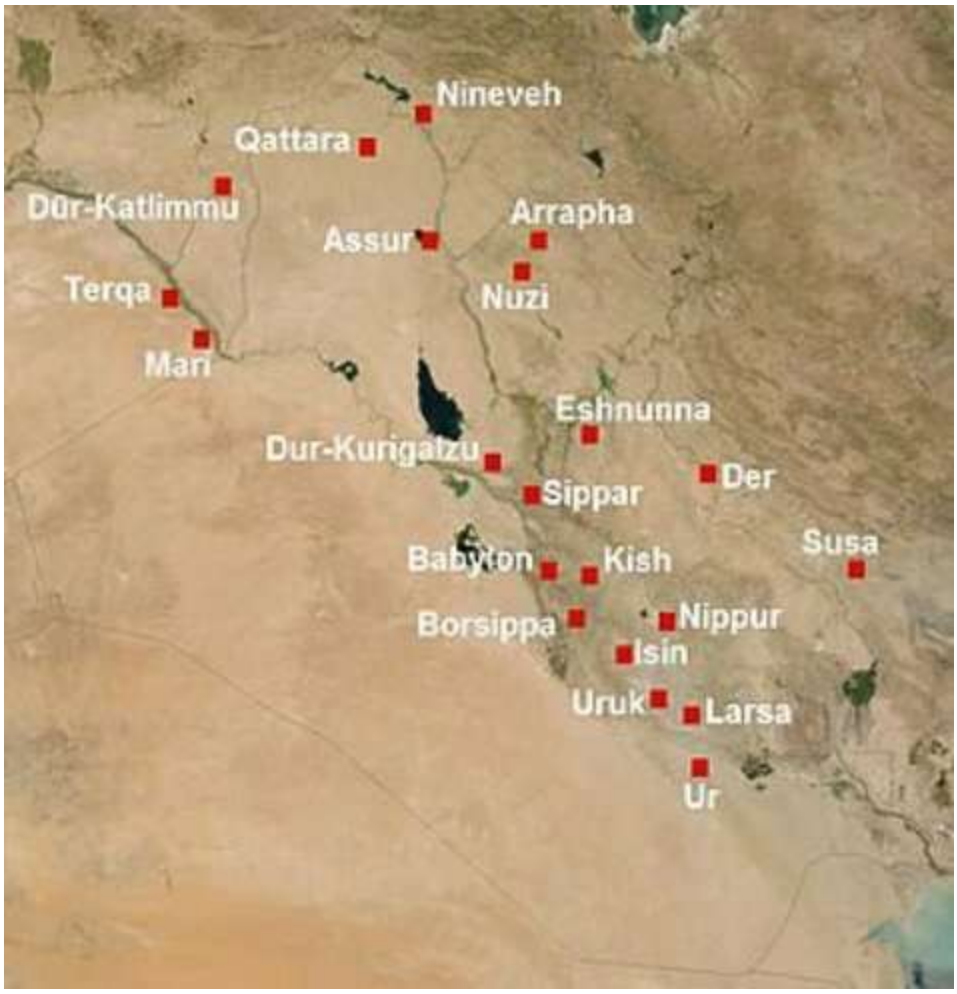
Spalinger, Anthony. 2005. War in Ancient Egypt. London: Blackwell.

The Assyrians

The Geographic Location of Ancient Assyria

Before any historical study of ancient Assyrian culture can be conducted, a brief geographical survey and identification of Assyria itself is warranted. The name Assyria is actually a modern derivation of the name of the ancient city of Aššur (Ashur in English), which is where Assyrian culture began (Kuhrt 2010, 1:82). The ancient city of Ashur was located approximately 100 kilometers (62 miles) south of modern Mosul, located along the banks of the Tigris River in what is today the state of Iraq (Kuhrt 2010, 1:81). As such, Ashur was part of greater Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent region, which allowed the city to grow in terms of both culture and population. Assyria was provided with plenty of water from the Tigris River, and it was also on the fringes of the rainfall zone, which meant that it was not totally dependent on irrigation (Kuhrt 2010, 1:81).

Location allowed the population of Assyria to grow, but its culture flourished due to its proximity to southern Mesopotamia, particularly cities such as Babylon, Ur, and Larsa. The Assyrians encountered and adopted concepts already in use by their neighbors, including writing, which spurred the Assyrians’ advancement and has since made it much easier for people to study them.



Joey Hewitt's map of Mesopotamia during the 2nd millennium BCE

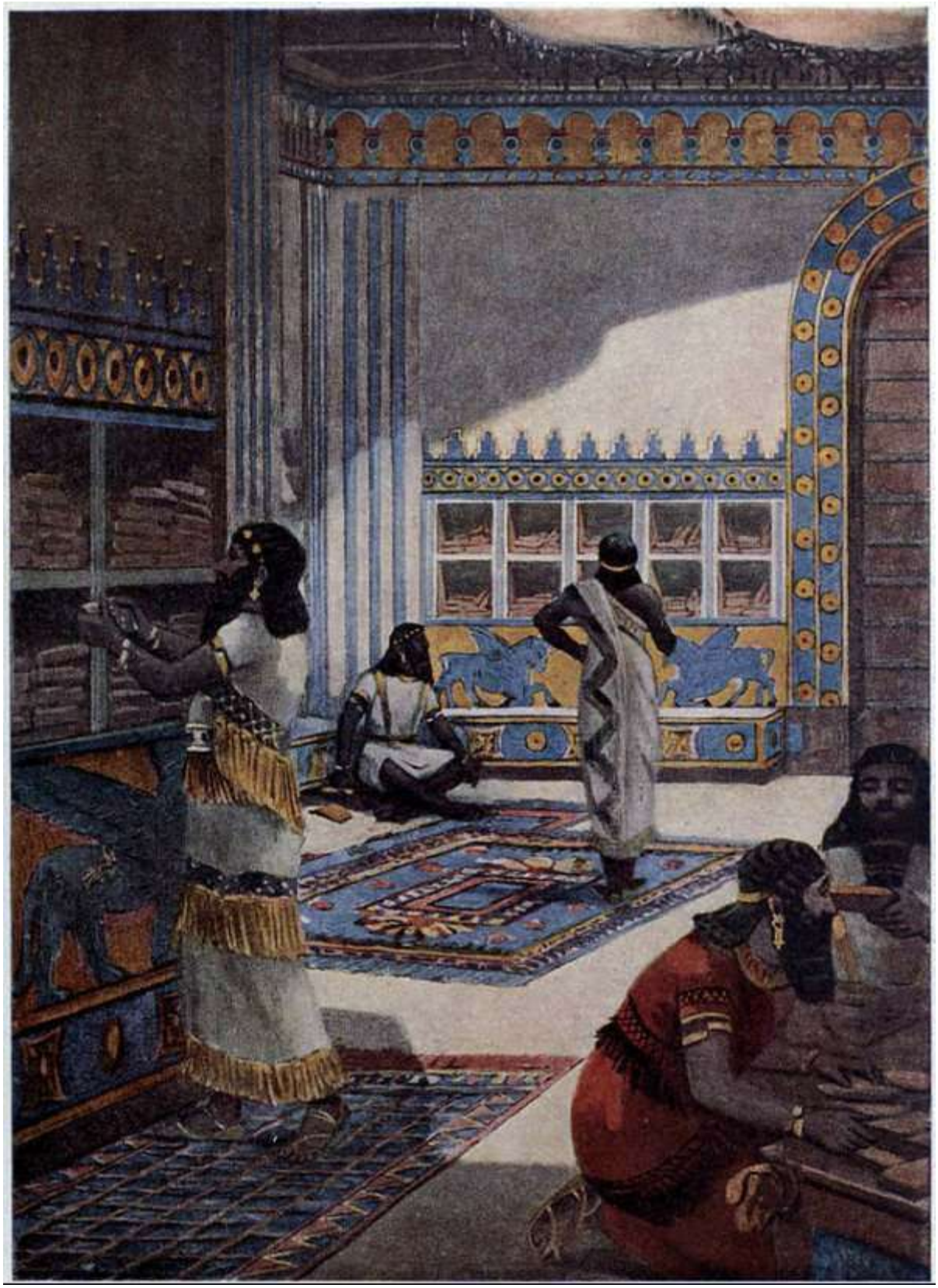
A letter sent circa 2400 BCE by the high-priest Lu'enna to the king of Lagash informing him of his son's death in combat.

The Assyrians' development of writing allows current historians to read about the empire's affairs, but it also allowed the Assyrians themselves the ability to document their own history. The Assyrians' idea of history was essentially the same as that of their Babylonian neighbors to the south and involved ideas such as destiny that were manifested in the past and projected forward into the future (Speiser 1983, 38-39). As such, the Assyrians' view of history was fundamentally different than the modern view. Modern notions of history are largely derived from the ancient Greeks, who believed that history should be written as a narrative and serve to teach those who read it. Modern views of history are largely divorced from ideas such as divine intervention, but to the Assyrians, it was the divine that made history, and as a result, they believed mortal failures were the result of not following divine law. In other words, history to the Assyrians was a theocratic history (Speiser

1983, 55-56).

Despite Assyrian historiography's long and apparently unchanging background from early Mesopotamian origins, the Middle Assyrian period witnessed a major change in Assyrian historiography. During the reign of Tiglath-pileser I (ca. 1114-1076), the Assyrians began to write royal annals which consisted of chronologically detailed accounts of military expeditions and royal hunts (van de Mieroop 2007, 180). The manner and context in which these annals were first composed is unknown, but it is possible these reports were initially meant to be letters from the kings to their gods (Speiser 1983, 66). The annals were incredibly specific in regards to geographic locales and ethnic groups affected by military campaigns, and they also graphically depicted the brutal nature of Assyrian warfare.

The location where many of these annals were located and subsequently discovered was in the library of king Ashurbanipal (668-631 BC). Over 5,000 cuneiform documents, which detailed affairs of the state and historical annals, were recovered from the ruins of Ashurbanipal's library (van de Mieroop 2007, 261). The discovery proved yet again that the Assyrians, far from simply being bloodthirsty warriors, placed a premium on literature and history.



An illustration depicting the library of Ashurbanipal

The Assyrian historical annals may have been the most interesting and entertaining form of Assyrian documents, but the royal king-lists have helped modern scholars accurately recreate Assyrian chronology. The Assyrians, like the Babylonians to the south and the Egyptians to the west, kept records of all their kings in what are known today as king-lists. King-lists could be as simple as an ordered listing of all kings, or they could include such things as length of reign and other important facts. At this point, three Assyrian king-lists are known to exist: one list ends in 935 BC, while the other two end in 745 and 722 BC (Pritchard 1992, 564).

The depiction of a high priest on the left and a king on the right

Old Assyrian Culture

American soldiers among the excavated ruins of Ashur in 2008

In its earliest phase, the city of Ashur, and therefore Assyria itself, consisted of no more than the city and its immediate environment (Kuhrt 2010, 1:88). While people are familiar with Assyria and the Assyrians, the city's name itself is interesting and a point of scholarly debate because it is also the name of the primary Assyrian god. It is probable that in archaic times, the locals attributed divine attributes to a rocky outcrop, named Ashur, above the Tigris River, which is where the city then got its name (Snell 2011, 49).

A Neo-Assyrian depiction of the god Ashur

Whether the god or the city actually came first may never be known for sure, but the city developed into a substantial state around the year 2000 BCE (Kuhrt 2010, 1:88), and as Ashur developed and grew, it was eventually conquered by a king from southern Mesopotamia who initiated a long series of royal connections between Ashur and Babylon that would last for centuries. The Babylonian conqueror of Ashur was named Shamsi-Adad (ca. 1813-1781 BCE), and although he was from Babylon and an ethnic Amorite (Kuhrt 2010, 1:86), he was accepted by the Assyrians and placed in their list of kings. In fact, Shamsi-Adad was the first Assyrian king to take the title *sharrum* (king), which set the precedent for all of his successors (Kuhrt 2010, 1:89).

The Assyrians recognized Shamsi-Adad as their first king, but interestingly, they also recognized his Babylonian origin: “Shamsi-Adad, the son of Ilu-kabkabi, went away to Babylonia in the time of Naram-Sin; in the eponymy of Ibni-Adad, Shamsi-Adad came back from Babylonia; he seized Ekallate; he stayed in Ekallate for three years; in the eponymy of Atamar-Ishtar, Shamsi-Adad came up from Ekallate and removed Erishu, son of Naram-Sin, from the throne.” (Pritchard 1992, 564).

Inscriptions from the reign of Shamsi-Adad demonstrate that although he was not from Ashur, he gave praise to the god Ashur and beautified the city. One inscription reads, “Shamsi-Adad, king of the universe, builder of the temple of Assur; who devotes his energies to the land between the Tigris and Euphrates. At the command of Assur who loves him, he whose (name) Anu and Enlil had named for great (deeds), above the kings who had gone before, the temple of Enlil, which Erishum, son of Ilu-shuma, had built, and whose structure had fallen to ruins: the temple of Enlil, my lord, a magnificent shrine, a spacious abode, the dwelling of Enlil, my lord, which had been planned according to the plan of wise architects, in my city Assur I roofed (that) temple with [cedars]; in the doors I placed door-leaves of cedar, covered with silver and gold. The walls of (that) temple, (laid) upon silver, gold, lapis lazuli, (and) *sandu*-stone, - (with) cedar-oil, choice oil, honey, and butter I sprinkled the mud-walls.” (Luckenbill 1989, 1:16). This passage also demonstrates another precedent that Shamsi-Adad would set for later Assyrian kings: the use of the epithet “ruler of the universe.”

Shamsi-Adad was the first great Assyrian king, but what made Assyria great during the Old Assyrian period was its economic prowess. The Assyrians were able to develop far-flung and sophisticated trade networks in the late third and early second millenniums BCE that would help establish Ashur as a major urban center in the ancient Near East. A number of documents, written in Akkadian cuneiform, were excavated in Anatolia (modern Turkey) and have provided modern scholars with enough information to actually understand and recreate the trade routes and systems used by the Assyrians. For example, the documents show that Assyrian merchants developed trading towns in Anatolia where goods from Mesopotamia and Iran were traded for goods in Anatolia. There were two types of Assyrian trading towns: the *karum*, which meant quay or harbor in Akkadian, was the primary trading center of a city, while the *wabartum* was a smaller trading center that functioned in a subordinate manner to the nearest *karum* (Kuhrt 2010, 1:92).

A relief depicting the transportation of cedar from Lebanon

Naturally, the city of Ashur acted as the central point in the trade routes. Tin from Iran and finished textiles from Babylon and southern Mesopotamia traveled through the city to the *karum* city of Kanesh in Anatolia (van de Mieroop 2007, 95). This journey from Ashur to Kanesh lasted about 50 days and was impossible during winter as the passages through the Taurus Mountains were blocked due to ice and snow (van de Mieroop 2007, 96). The Assyrian merchants carried the tin and textiles on donkeys that they all traded (including the donkeys) when they arrived in Anatolia for silver or gold that they then brought back to Ashur (Kuhrt 2010, 1:94).

One of the most interesting aspects of the Assyrian trade network was that it was carried out largely by private entrepreneurs. The Assyrian king was not directly involved (van de Mieroop 2007, 97), and it's unclear why the Assyrian king did not take a more dominant role in the merchant activities of his people during the Old Assyrian period. Scholars have theorized that

Assyrian kings might not have wanted to upset a system that worked, or that the kings were not yet powerful enough to influence such intricate networks.

As impressive and great as they were, the economic activities of the Assyrians would take a back seat to their military endeavors when the kings of the Middle Assyrian period came to power.

The Middle Assyrian Period (ca. 1400-1050)

A map of the different empires in the region during the 15th century BCE

The Middle Assyrian period is the era during which Assyrian culture as it is recognized today truly developed. Between the 14th and 11th centuries BCE,

the Assyrians were able to expand their borders from a city-state based around Ashur, and in the process, the empire became a major regional power in the Near East, not to mention a military juggernaut. The Assyrians also developed a sophisticated corpus of written material during this period and became exceptional diplomats. Since Middle Assyrian society became dominated by the military, it had something similar to the feudal structure that dominated Europe in the Middle Ages. Most of the arable land in Assyria was owned by the king, who gave concessions to men that performed admirably in military campaigns (van de Mieroop 2007, 183).

Although the expansion of the Assyrian state during the Middle Assyrian period was fairly gradual, the rule of Ashur-ubalit I (ca. 1365-1330) is generally viewed as the beginning of the period, and also when the expansion began (Kuhrt 2010, 1:351). Ashur-ubalit I was able to take advantage of troubles outside the Assyrian kingdom by annexing territories to Assyria's east after the Hittites attacked the kingdom of the Mitanni (van de Mieroop 2007, 181), and by the rule of the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (ca. 1243-1207), the Assyrians had consumed the Mitanni kingdom east of the Euphrates River and were well on the way to wiping out that entire kingdom (van de Mieroop 2007, 182).

The Assyrians became known for their military prowess during the Middle Assyrian period, but their growth and imperial status was due as much to their diplomatic efforts. In the late 15th century BCE, the major kingdoms of the Near East expanded their borders until they met and occasionally overlapped one another. The Egyptians, Hittites, and Babylonians fought border battles with each other over colonies, but they also traded rare commodities and sometimes royal princesses. The collection of Near Eastern empires that existed from approximately the 14th-11th centuries is often referred to as the "Great Powers Club" or the period of Great Empires (Kuhrt 2012). The Assyrians entered the stage later than the Egyptians, Hittites, and Babylonians, but by the late 13th century BCE, they were members of the club. When the Hittite king Tudhaliya IV (ca. 1237-09 BC) concluded a treaty with the vassal state of Amurru, he listed the Assyrians as one of the Great Powers (van de Mieroop 2007, 183).

Today, much is known about the geopolitical situation during this period

thanks to a large number of Akkadian cuneiform tablets that were discovered in the ruins of the ancient Egyptian city of Amarna in 1887 (Cochavi-Rainey 1999, 1). The discovery of these tablets, known today as the "Amarna Letters," revealed that Akkadian was the language of diplomacy at the time and cuneiform was the style of writing used in official correspondence between leaders. The letters also revealed that the geopolitical situation in the ancient Near East was much more complicated than many believed; the major powers all referred to one another in their correspondences as "brother" and took a tone of equity, while the smaller states, which were usually relegated to some type of colonial status, had to prostrate themselves in writing to the larger states.

The late second millennium BC was a period of unrest in the Near East, especially as the Bronze Age was swept away and replaced by the Iron Age. The transition to the Iron Age proved to be especially violent, and it brought about the end of the Great Powers Club. A mysterious coalition of warrior tribes known collectively as the Sea Peoples ravaged the coastal kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean, and they destroyed the kingdoms of Ugarit and Hatti and nearly destroyed Egypt as well (Sandars 1987, 105-155).

Since they were located further inland from the Mediterranean coast, the Assyrians did not suffer as much from the Sea Peoples attacks, but the empire was not totally immune to the general situation either. A group of Semitic speaking people, known as the Arameans, began to attack and ravage numerous Mesopotamian cities around this same time (Haywood 2005, 41). The Aramean raids became the primary focus of Tiglath-pileser's reign, a fact mentioned in the historical annals: "With the help of Assur, my lord, I led forth my chariots and warriors and went into the desert. Into the midst of the Ahlami, Arameans, enemies of Assur, my lord, I marched. The country from Suhi to the city of Carchemish, in the land of Hatti, I raided in one day. I slew their troops; their spoil, their goods and their possessions in countless numbers I carried away. The rest of their forces, which had fled from before the terrible weapons of Assur, my lord, and had crossed over the Euphrates – in pursuit of them I crossed the Euphrates in vessels made of skins. Six of their cities, which lay at the foot of the mountain of Beshri, I captured, I burned with fire, I laid (them) waste, I destroyed (them). Their spoil, their goods and their possessions I carried away to my city Assur."

(Luckenbill 1989, 1:83). However, despite Tiglath-pileser’s best efforts, the Aramean hordes eventually reduced the Assyrian Empire to its original heartland around Ashur by 1050 BCE (van de Mieroop 2007, 182).

The Arameans and the general collapse of the period may have reduced the land the Assyrians held, but Robert Drews has argued that their use of infantry helped them survive the collapse, whereas others, such as the Hittites, did not (Drews 1993, 140). *The Historians' History of the World* described Assyrian infantry: "The spear of the Assyrian footman was short, scarcely exceeding the height of a man; that of the horseman appears to have been considerably longer… The shaft was probably of some strong wood, and did not consist of a reed, like that of the modern Arab lance."

An illustration depicting an Assyrian soldier

It will probably never be definitively determined how and why the Assyrians survived the collapse of the Bronze Age, but Drew's argument brings to light an important aspect of Assyrian culture that would define them in their golden age: their military prowess.

8th century depiction of an Assyrian warship

The Neo-Assyrian Period (934-610 BC)

A relief depicting Assyrian archers and a siege weapon attacking a fortified enemy

When the Assyrians crawled out of Ashur after the interregnum imposed on the region by the Arameans and Sea Peoples, they quickly established themselves as the most powerful people in the Near East and ushered in their Golden Age. Generally, the chronology of the Neo-Assyrian period is divided by modern scholars into two phases, with the first being the 9th century (when the empire was reestablished) and the second lasting from the middle of the 8th century until the empire's demise (van de Mieroop 2007, 229).

There are numerous extant primary sources from this period, not only because the Assyrians became meticulous compilers of their annals but also because other peoples, most notably the Israelites, also wrote about the Assyrians. Beautiful and detailed pictorial reliefs have also been excavated from the royal palaces in Ashur, Nineveh, and Kalah that depict numerous battlefield tactics and weapons in great detail (Curtis and Reade 1995).

One of Assyria's most important leaders during the period was Sargon II

(721-705 BCE), who restructured the Assyrian state internally, conducted military campaigns almost every year, and incorporated the conquered territories into provinces (van de Mieroop 2007, 248). In fact, one of the most notable changes he made to the Assyrian system was to increase the number of provinces from 12 to 25, which decreased the power of the provincial governors (van de Mieroop 2007, 248).

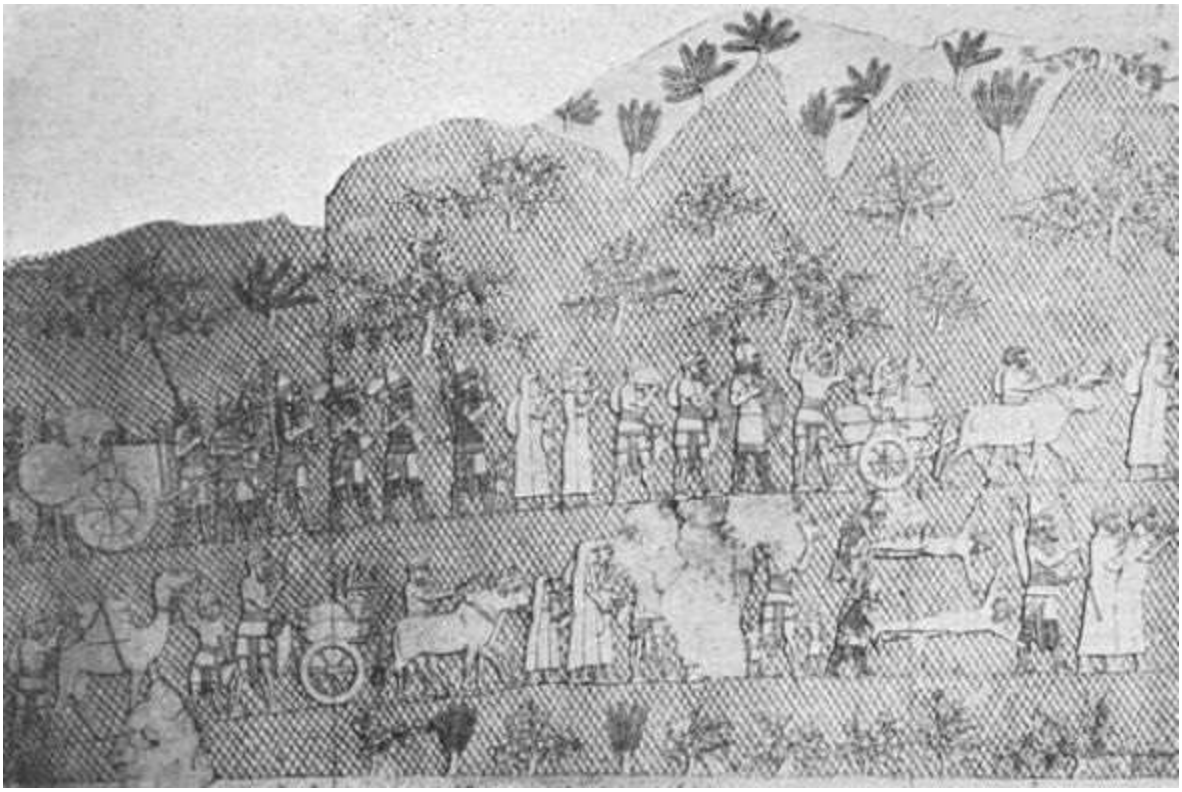
A relief depicting Sargon II meeting with a foreign dignitary

One of the most important provinces within the Assyrian Empire was Samaria. Also known as Israel, Samaria repeatedly rebelled against their Assyrian overlords, but in 722, the Assyrians overran Samaria once and for all, killing countless numbers and sending most of the rest of its inhabitants

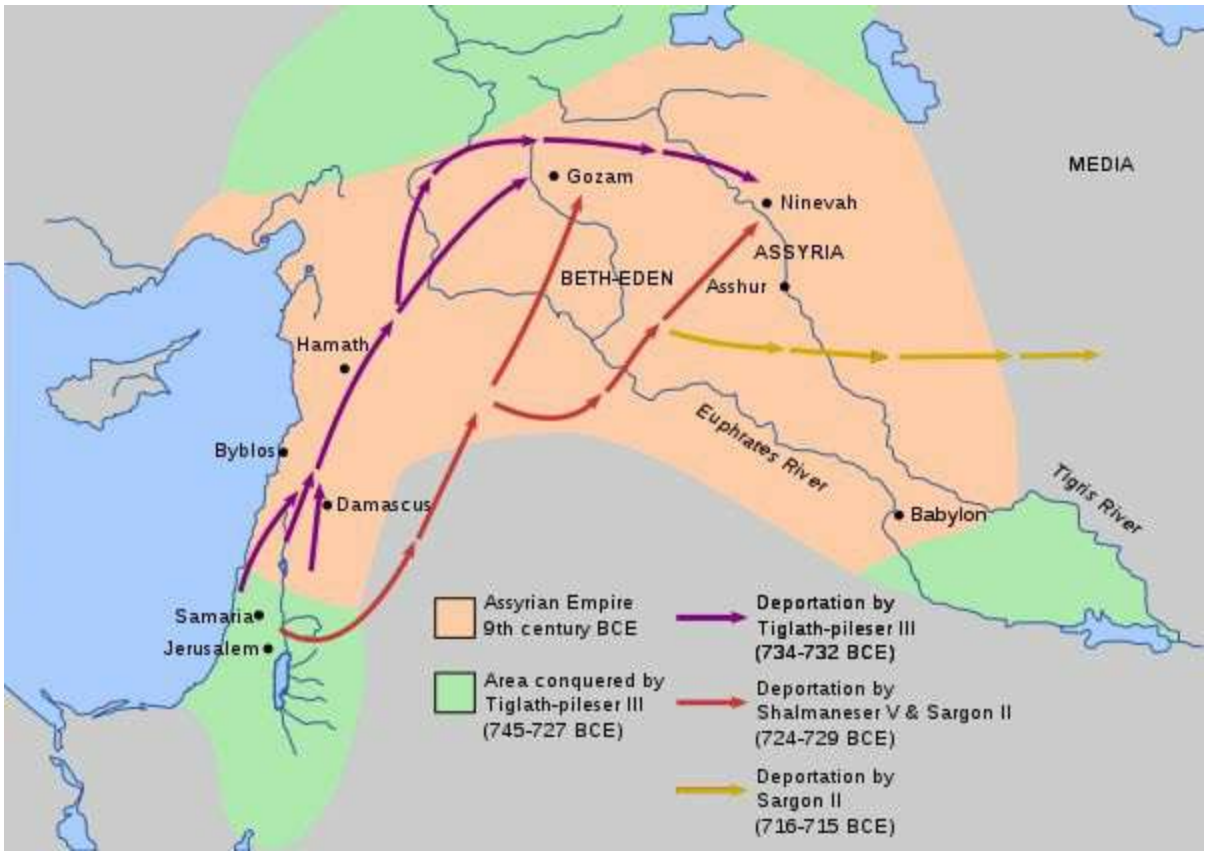
into forced exile. The events of Samaria's fall were chronicled in the Assyrian annals from the reign of Sargon II and the Old Testament, and although the two sources present the event from different perspectives, they corroborate each other for the most part and together present a reliable account of the situation. The Assyrian record reads, "I besieged and conquered Samaria (*Sa-me-ri-na*), led away as booty 27,290 inhabitants of it. I formed from among them a contingent of 50 chariots and made remaining (inhabitants) assume their (social) positions. I installed over them an officer of mine and imposed upon them the tribute of the former king. Hanno, king of Gaza and also Sib'e, the *turtan* of Egypt (*Mu-ṣu-ri*), set out from Rapihu against me to deliver a decisive battle. I defeated them; Sib'e ran away, afraid when he (only) heard the noise of my (approaching) army, and has not been seen again. Hanno, I captured personally. I received tribute from Pir'u of Musuru, from Samsi, queen of Arabia (and) It'amar the Sabaen, gold in dust-form, horses (and) camels." (Oppenheim 1992, 284-5).

The Assyrian account reveals that others in the region, namely the Egyptians, were involved on Israel's side to a certain extent, but it is uncertain how many troops were sent with Sib'e because this account cannot be corroborated by any Egyptian source. Perhaps the most striking piece of information is that nearly 30,000 Israelites were removed from the region; the forced removal of rebellious populations by the Assyrians was a brutal but effective tactic that they commonly used (and is discussed more thoroughly below).

This relief depicts the king of Israel, Jehu, bowing before the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser III, during the 9th century.



This relief depicts a forced removal of Judeans during the 8th century



Joel Holdsworth's map of forced deportations by the Assyrians during the period

The Biblical account of the fall of Samaria is quite similar to the Assyrian, but with a few minor differences. The account states, "And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea a son of Elah king of Israel, that Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria and besieged it. And at the end of three years they took it; even in the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken. And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria and put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the city of the Medes." (2 Kings 18:9-11).

The Biblical account fills in a couple of details, including the duration of the siege (three years), the name of the king of Israel (Hoshea), the name of the king of the southern kingdom of Judah (Hezekiah), and that Shalmaneser V (726-722 BC) was the Assyrian king who first led the siege.

At first glance, it would appear that the two sources are conflicted over the

Assyrian king, but the primary source known as the *Babylonian Chronicle*, which was written as a combination king-list/annal, may help shed light on this chronological quagmire. The source states, "On the twenty-fifth day of the month Tebet, Shalmaneser (V) ascended the throne in Assyrian (and Akkad). He ravaged *Samaria*. The fifth year: Shalmaneser (V) died in the month Tebet. For five years Shalmaneser (V) ruled Akkad and Assyria. On the twelfth day of the month Tebet, Sargon (II) ascended the throne in Assyria." (Grayson 2000, 73). Thus, the meticulous record keeping and keen sense of history of the Assyrians helps clear the confusion somewhat. It was Shalmaneser V who initially led the siege of Samaria, but he died during the process, so it was his successor, Sargon II, who completed the task with brutal efficiency.

The circumstances surrounding the transfer of power between the Assyrian kings is unknown, but many modern scholars of the ancient Near East believe that Sargon II replaced Shalmaneser V "in a coup d'etat, and subsequently claimed the capture of Samaria for himself." (Kitchen 2003, 39). To the Biblical writers, the Assyrian king who destroyed Israel was not as important as the event and its historical and theological significance (Kitchen 2003, 39).

The Assyrian siege and destruction of Samaria seemed to set into motion a chain of events of similarly brutal sieges that the Assyrian war machine meted out to rebellious provinces and any others who stood in its way in the late 8th and early 7th centuries BCE. A few years after he destroyed Israel, Sargon II turned his attention to one of Samaria's neighbors, the coastal city of Ashdod. According to the annals from the Assyrian city of Khorsabad, Iamani, the king of Ashdod, decided to abandon his subordinate status to Assyria in favor of Egypt, which was ruled by the Nubians at the time. The text states, "Iamani from Ashdod, afraid of my armed force (lit.: weapons), left his wife and children and fled to the frontier of M[usru] which belongs to Meluhha (i.e. Ethiopia) and hid (lit.: stayed) there like a thief. I installed an officer of mine as governor over his entire large country and its prosperous inhabitants, (thus) aggrandizing (again) the territory belonging to Ashur, the king of the gods. The terror (-inspiring) glamour of Ashur, my lord, overpowered (however) the king of Meluhha and he threw him (i.e. Iamani) in fetters on hands and feet, and sent him to me, to Assyria. I conquered and sacked the towns Shinuhtu (and) Samaria, and all Israel (lit: 'Omri-Land' *Bit*

Ḫu-um-ri-ia). I caught, like a fish, the Greek (Ionians) who live (on islands) amidst the Western Sea." (Luckenbill, 1989, 40-41).

At first, this text appears somewhat confusing, but a closer examination reveals not only the Assyrians' military might but also the complex geopolitical situation in the Near East at the time. Iamani fled to Egypt (Musru), which was in fact ruled by Shabaqa (716-702 BC) and the Nubian Twenty Fifth Dynasty (Meluhha), where he was then turned back over to the Assyrians. It appears that the Nubians under Shabaqa were "in no mood to incur the wrath of the Assyrian king" (Spalinger 1973, 97).

Although the rebellious Iamani's sojourn in Egypt was short lived and Sargon II never turned his fury towards the Nile Valley, subsequent kings in both Assyria and Egypt set the stage for a conflict that devastated Egypt and left her temporarily under Assyrian rule. Spalinger contends that the Assyrians never intended to invade Egypt, but due to the Nubian dynasty's meddling in Assyria's affairs in the Levant, they were eventually compelled to act (Spalinger 1974b, 325). The first major conflict between Egypt and Assyria took place in the Levant near the city of Eltekeh in 702/701 BC. The Egyptians were led by the Nubian crown prince Taharqa (690-664 BC) – although the king during the battle was Shebitqu (702-690 BC) – and were allied with the kingdom of Judah against the Assyrian king Sennacherib (704-681 BC). 2 Kings 19:9 and Isaiah 37:1 both mention that "Tirhakah king of Ethiopia" led a force to help support the Judah king, Hezekiah, against the Assyrian siege, while an Egyptian source eludes to the crown prince's journey to the Levant. It states, "He (Taharqa) came Upstream to Thebes, in the midst of fine youths, his majesty, king Shebitqu, justified, went after them to Nubia, he was with him. He loved him more than all his brothers. He passed by the home of Amen Gempaaten and he worshiped before the door of the temple with the army of his majesty, sailing north together with him." (Macadam 1949, 1:14-21). Crown prince Taharqa then joined Hezekiah and his army against the Assyrians.

The confusion in the Biblical accounts concerning the correct name of the Egyptian-Nubian king can be ascribed to the fact that "the existing narrations were drawn up at a date after 690 B.C., when it was one of the current facts of life that Taharqa was king of Egypt and Nubia" (Kitchen 2003, 159-60).

The Assyrian historical annals give a more detailed account of the battle and its aftermath: “The officials, nobles and people of Ekron, who had thrown Padî, their king, bound by (treaty to) Assyria, into fetters of iron and had given him over to Hezekiah, the Jew (*Iaudai*), – he kept him in confinement like an enemy, – they (*lit.*, their heart) became afraid and called upon the Egyptian kings, the bowmen, chariots and horses of the king of Meluhha (Ethiopia), a countless host, and these came to their aid. In the neighborhood of the city of Altakû (Eltekeh), their ranks being drawn up before me, they offered battle. (Trusting) in the aid of Assur, my lord, I fought with them and brought about their defeat. The Egyptian charioteers and princes, together with the charioteers of the Ethiopian king, my hands took alive in the midst of the battle. . . I besieged Eltekeh (and) Timnah, conquered (them) and carried their spoils away. I assaulted Ekron and killed the officials and patricians who had committed the crime and hung their bodies on poles around the city . . . As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity . . . I drove out (of them) 200,150 people . . . Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage.” (Oppenheim 1992, 287-88)

Hezekiah and Judah made a disastrous miscalculation when they decided to rebel against Assyria, but the Egyptian-Nubians made an even more fatal mistake because their interference in Assyrian affairs would eventually lead to the collapse of their dynasty. While Sennacherib’s war against the Egyptians was the first of its kind, it was short-lived, and he never attempted an actual invasion of Egypt. However, Sennacherib’s successor, Esarhaddon (680-669 BC), took the next logical step and attempted two invasions of Egypt. Esarhaddon’s attack in 674 BC was unsuccessful, but he was finally able to conquer Egyptian territory on the edge of the eastern Delta in 671 BCE (Kuhrt 2010, 2:634). Esarhaddon first made a “show of strength at the border of Egypt” by conquering Phoenicia and the Levant before setting his sights on Egypt (Spalinger 1974a, 298).

Assyria’s successful invasion of Egypt was commemorated on an alabaster tablet from Ashur that reads, “I cut down with the sword and conquered . . . I caught like a fish (and) cut off his head. I trod up [on Arzâ at] the ‘Brook of Eg[ypt].’ I put Asuhili, its king, in fetters and took [him to

Assyria]. I conquered the town of Bazu in a district which is far away. Upon Qanaia, king of Tilmun. I imposed tribute due to me as (his) lord. I conquered the country of Shupria in its full extent and slew with (my own) weapon Ik(!)Teshup, its king who did not listen to my personal orders. I conquered Tyre which is (an island) amidst the sea. I took away all the towns and the possessions of Ba'lu its king, who had put his trust on Tirhakah (*Tarqû*), king of Nubia (*Kûsu*). I conquered Egypt (*Musur*), Paturi[si] and Nubia. Its king, Tirhakah, I wounded five times with arrowshots and ruled over his entire country; I car[ried much booty away]. All the kings from (the islands) amidst the sea – from the country Iadanna (Cyprus), as far as Tarsisi, bowed to my feet and I received heavy tribute (from them)." (Pritchard 1992, 290). The details in this particular inscription are historically important because they not only place Taharqa, the ruling Egyptian king, at the scene of the battle but also claim that he was wounded.

Another Assyrian text, known as the *Senjiril stela*, offers even more interesting details about the battle: "I led siege to Memphis, his royal residence, and conquered it in half a day by means of mines, breaches, and assault ladders; I destroyed (it), tore down (its walls) and burnt it down. His 'queen,' the women of his palace, Ushanahuru, his 'heir apparent,' his other children, his possessions, horses, large and small cattle beyond counting, I carried away as booty to Assyria. All Ethiopians I deported from Egypt – leaving not even one to do homage (to me). Everywhere in Egypt, I appointed new (local) kings, governors, officers (*saknu*), harbor overseers, officials and administrative personnel. I installed regular sacrificial dues for Ashur and the (other) great gods, my lords, for all times. I imposed upon them tribute due to me (as their) overlord, (to be paid) annually without ceasing." (Luckenbill 1989, 273-4).

A picture of Assarhaddon's victory stele

Two important historical points are raised in this inscription. First, it describes the imperial administration that was briefly imposed on Egypt during Assyrian rule, and of the many governors appointed to rule Egypt, one of those, Nekau I, would become the progenitor of the native Egyptian Twenty Sixth Dynasty. The second point is the obvious differentiation that the Assyrians made between the Egyptians and Nubians. This idea, which was proposed by Spalinger, appears to be further substantiated by this text.

Also, it is interesting that Esarhaddon claims that he deported “all Nubians from Egypt.” At its face value, this part of the text seems extremely inaccurate since there was never any mass deportation of Nubians to other parts of the Assyrian Empire that modern scholars know of, but the truth may be that a number of the ruling class were deported and possibly held as hostages in Assyria.

Although Esarhaddon’s invasion of Egypt resulted in the successful incorporation of the Nile Valley into the Assyrian Empire, his successor invaded Egypt twice more in order to keep order. Ashurbanipal (668-627 BC) faced enormous opposition in Egypt from the Nubian elite and thus inflicted the heaviest damage and destruction on Egypt in its history.

A relief depicting Assyrian cavalry archers (with the one in the center possibly meant to represent Ashurbanipal)

Modern scholarly knowledge of the two invasions initiated by Ashurbanipal comes from seven Assyrian historical texts, but unfortunately

they “lack a proper chronological arrangement” (Spalinger 1974b, 316). The so-called Rassam Cylinder, written between 644 and 636 BCE (Luckenbill 1989, 290), provides modern scholarship with the best recreation of both invasions. Analysis of the Assyrian texts reveals that Ashurbanipal’s first invasion was the result of Taharqa’s attempts to recapture the throne of Egypt, while the second invasion was precipitated by rebellious Egyptian vassals who tried to take advantage of the power vacuum caused by the war between the Nubians and Assyrians.

Ashurbanipal’s first Egyptian campaign, conducted in 669/8 BC (Spalinger 1974b, 317), is related in the first part of the Rassam Cylinder. It states, “In my first campaign I marched against Magan and Meluhha. Tarkû (Tirhakah), king of Egypt and Ethiopia (Kush), whom Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, the father who begot me, had defeated . . . Against the kings, the governors, whom my father had installed in Egypt, he marched, (intent) on slaying, plundering and seizing Egypt. He broke in upon them and established himself in Memphis, the city which my father had captured and added to the territory of Assyria . . . I defeated his army in a battle on the open plain. Tarkû heard of the defeat of his armies, while in Memphis . . . He forsook Memphis and fled to save his life to Ni’ (Thebes). This town (too) I seized and led my army into it to repose (there).” (Luckenbill 1989, 292-3).

A relief celebrating Ashurbanipal’s destruction of the town of Susa in 647

Ashurbanipal and the Assyrians’ control over Egypt was tenuous at best, and the Nubians kept interfering in the local situation in order to retake the throne, which resulted in one final, destructive invasion of Egypt and the sacking of Thebes in 664 BCE. Egypt was temporarily under the control of the Nubian king, Tantamani, forcing Ashurbanipal to lead his forces into Egypt in order to reassert Assyrian control over the Nile Valley.

The Rassam Cylinder is also the ancient source for Ashurbanipal’s second campaign against Egypt, and according to this text, Tantamani was not much

of a match for Ashurbanipal: “In my second campaign I made straight for Egypt and Ethiopia. Tandamanê heard of the advance of my army and that I was invading the territory of Egypt. He forsook Memphis and fled to Ni’, to save his life.” (Luckenbill 1989, 2:295).

The extent of the destruction of Thebes is unknown, especially since the Egyptians were not in the habit of recording their defeats, but one can deduce from previous examples that it was extensive because the Egyptians were considered a rebellious province. There is a good chance that Ashurbanipal had the sacred statue of the god Amun removed from its home in the Karnak Temple and sent to Ashur or Nineveh as previous Assyrian rulers did with the sacred statues of other rebellious peoples (a practice discussed more thoroughly below). Nonetheless, the year 664 was the last time the Assyrians set foot in Egypt; after that year, their power began to wane and the Egyptian presence in the Near East saw a reemergence under the native Twenty Sixth Dynasty.

Assyria’s policy towards Israel, the Levant, and Egypt can be viewed from the perspective of a stronger, more militaristic people who used their might to overpower their weaker foreign neighbors, but its policy towards Babylon was a little more complicated. In the periods when Assyria was strong and Babylon was weak, primarily in the Neo-Assyrian period, the Assyrians were often reluctant to take over the city and surrounding region outright, perhaps because Babylon directly influenced culture and was the older of the two (van de Mieroop 2007, 252). By 722 BCE, Assyria governed Babylon directly (Kuhrt 2010, 2:497), but during the rule of the six major Neo-Assyrian kings, approximately 20 transitions of power took place in Babylon (van de Mieroop 2007, 252).

Sennacherib found Babylon particularly troublesome because he was opposed there by a coalition of Chaldeans, Arameans, native Babylonians, and Elamites in 691 BCE (van de Mieroop 2007, 255). A 15 year siege ensued, which ended in the Assyrian destruction of Babylon. The Assyrian annals read, “At the beginning of my kingship, I brought about the overthrow of Merodach-baladan, king of Babylonia, together with the armies of Elam, in the plain of Kish. In the midst of that battle he forsook his camp, made his escape alone, fled to Guzummanu, went into the swamps and

marshes, and (thus) saved his life. The chariots, wagons, horses, mules, asses, camels and (Bactrian) camels which he had forsaken at the onset of battle, my hands seized. Into his palace in Babylon I entered joyfully and I opened his treasure-house; -- gold, silver, vessels of gold and silver, precious stones of all kinds, good and property, an enormous (heavy) treasure, his wife, his hare, his courtiers and attendants, all of his artisans, as many as there were, his palace servants, I brought out, I counted as spoil, I seized." (Luckenbill 1989, 2:133-34).

Sennacherib's destruction of Babylon did not permanently destroy the great city – in fact, the Babylonians would later play a role in the destruction of the Assyrian Empire – but it did serve to pacify the city for some time. Esarhaddon generally followed the same policy towards Babylon as his predecessors when he gave his son, Shamash-shuma-ukin, the kingship of Babylon. However, Shamash-shuma-ukin rebelled against his younger brother Ashurbanipal, who was the king of Assyria in 652 (van de Mieroop 2007, 255). Ashurbanipal had to campaign for several years in order to pacify Babylon once more, which drained the royal coffers and was ultimately part of the Assyrians' own demise (van de Mieroop 2007, 255).

Neo-Assyrian Building Projects

Military campaigns and conquests were the dominant aspect of Assyrian history, but the Assyrian homeland was a place full of magnificent monuments that rivaled any in the ancient Near East. Indeed, the various peoples and lands that the Assyrians conquered gave them the funds to build elaborate building projects, which included entirely new cities dedicated to their many deities (Kuhrt 2010, 2:482).

Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC) built the new city of Kalah (Nimrud), signaling a new direction in the way the Neo-Assyrian kings wished to fashion their image. In Kalah, Ashurnasirpal II had a ziggurat built as part of the royal palace and temple complex (van de Mieroop 2007, 233). Ziggurats were triangular temple towers that represented mountains where the gods lived (Frankfort 1996, 22). In ancient Mesopotamian society, ziggurats were usually part of a larger temple complex dedicated to a particular deity and were built as early as the third millennium BC throughout such southern Mesopotamian cities as Ur, Uruk, and Babylon (Frankfort 1996, 20).

Ashurnasirpal II's ziggurat at Kalah thus represents a link of continuity with the older cultures of southern Mesopotamia with whom the Assyrians admired and emulated in many ways.

Although most of Kalah was destroyed when the Assyrian Empire collapsed and was lost to history, Ashurnasirpal II recorded its construction on a foundation inscription. Part of the text reads, "I took over again the city of Kalah in that wisdom of mine, the knowledge which Ea, the king of the subterranean waters, has bestowed upon me, I removed the old hill of rubble;

> I dug down to the water level; I heaped up a (new) terrace (measuring) from the water to the upper edge 120 layers of bricks; upon that I erected as my royal seat and for my personal enjoyment 7 beautiful halls (roofed with) boxwood, *Magan-ash*, cedar, cypress, terebinth, *tarpi'u* and *mehru* (beams); I sheathed doors made of cedar, cypress, juniper, boxwood and *Magan-ash* with bands of bronze; I hung them in their doorways; I surrounded them (the doors) with decorative bronze bolts; to proclaim my heroic deeds I painted on their (the palaces') walls with vivid blue paint how I have marched across the mountain ranges, the foreign countries and the seas, my conquests in all countries . . . [I collected and planted in my garden] from the countries through which I marched and the mountains which I crossed, the trees (and plants raise from) seeds from wherever I discovered them. (Pritchard 1992, 558-9)

This vivid description depicts the image of a beautiful and ostentatious palace built with materials acquired by conquest, and one that contained numerous pictorial reliefs that depicted and boasted of the king's conquests. Perhaps one of the more interesting parts of this passage is the exotic garden that Ashurnasirpal II claims to have made from flora collected from abroad. One can imagine that Ashurnasirpal II's exotic garden at his Kalah palace may have served as an inspiration for the later but more famously known Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

Ashurnasirpal II's ambitious building program at Kalah set a precedent that would be exceeded by his successors. Sargon II followed Ashurnasirpal II's idea by building a new city – Dur-Sharrukin (Sargonville) – for his capital (van de Mieroop 2007, 234). Dur-Sharrukin was built just to the northeast of Nineveh and was dedicated just before the king died in 706 BC (Frankfort

1996, 143). Sargon II's grand city was enclosed by a wall and an inner citadel wall that protected the royal residence and the most important temples (Frankfort 1996, 144). Among the most important structures in Dur-Sharrukin was a ziggurat that may have stood around 143 feet high with a similarly sized base (Frankfort 1996, 150). The doorways to the palace were flanked by statues of winged human-headed bulls known as lamassu, so foreign emissaries would have passed by the imposing statues, which towered above any man at over eight feet, in order to meet with the Assyrian king (Frankfort 1996, 148). Sargon II's ambitious building project was replicated by later Assyrian kings to a certain extent, but none of the others built entirely new cities.

A lamassu excavated at Dur-Sharrukin

Sennacherib chose an old Assyrian city, Nineveh, as his capital, but he followed the precedent set down by his predecessors to a certain extent by rebuilding much of the city that had been neglected (van de Mieroop 2007, 234). In fact, Sennacherib sought to remake Nineveh the greatest of all Assyrian cities, and his royal palace was actually named the "Palace without a Rival." Part of the building inscription reads, "At that time, Nineveh, the noble metropolis, the city beloved of Ishtar, wherein are all the meeting places of gods and goddesses; the everlasting structure, the eternal foundation, whose plan had been designed from old, along with the writing of the constellations, and whose structure had been made beautiful; the beautiful (artistic) place, the abode of divine law . . . But I, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, gave my thought and brought my mind to accomplish this work according to the command (will) of the gods . . . I cut down the reed marshes which are in Chaldea, and had the men of the foe whom my hands had conquered drag their mighty reeds (to Assyria) for the completion of its work . . . Therein I had them build a palace of ivory, maple, boxwood, mulberry, cedar, cypress, spruce and pistachio, the 'Palace without a Rival,' for my royal abode." (Luckenbill 1989, 160-61).

Nineveh was also recognized in the Old Testament as the abode of Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:36), but the ambitious building and beautification program that the king initiated there would be the peak of building activities in Assyria. The later Assyrian kings were more concerned with keeping their possessions and their lives, but Esarhaddon is known for a modest building program at Babylon. As noted above, Sennacherib devastated Babylon during his reign as retribution for resistance, but his successor, Esarhaddon, saw the need to rebuild the great Mesopotamian city, perhaps out of a combination of admiration and sympathy. Any written text in which Esarhaddon admitted that his Assyrian predecessor defiled a sacred Mesopotamian city would have presented all kinds of historical and theological problems, so the source of the destruction was attributed to the Babylonians' greed. Thus, the document casts the Assyrians as the agent of the vengeful Babylonian god Marduk. The text reads, "Before my time, in the reign of an earlier king, there befell evil days in Sumer and Akkad. The people who dwelt in Shuanna (Babylon) split into factions, plotting rebellion the while. They stretched their hands into Esagila, the temple of the gods, and squandered (its) gold, silver and precious

stones in Elam in payment (for aid). Anger seized the lord of the gods, Marduk. For the overthrow of the land and the destruction of its people he devised evil plans . . . [Seventy] years as the period of its desolation he wrote (down in the Book of Fate). But the merciful Marduk – his anger lasted but a moment – turned (the Book of Fate) upside down and ordered its (the city's) restoration in the eleventh year . . . I summoned all of my artisans and the people of Karduniash (Babylonia) in their totality. I made them carry the basket and laid the headpan upon them. In choice oil, honey, butter, wine, wine of the shining mountains, I laid its foundation walls . . . Babylon the city under feudal protection, Imgur-Bel, its wall, Nmitti-Bel, its outer wall, from their foundations to their turrets, I built anew." (Luckenbill 1989, 242-44).

In this text, Esarhaddon was not only the rebuilder of Babylon, but also Marduk's earthly representative. The text is also revision since the true destroyer of Babylon, Sennacherib, is never mentioned by name.

Assyrian Warfare and Tactics

The Assyrians rebuilt and refurbished old cities such as Ashur and Babylon and created new cities like Kalah and Sargonville, but what allowed them to make those great works of art and architecture was a level of brutality that has rarely been matched in history. The Assyrians were notable during the Neo-Assyrian period for developing new battlefield and control tactics, as well as inventing new weapons, to the extent that they were arguably the first people in history to turn warfare into a science. The Assyrians' tactics had psychological components, and the army and the government were so intertwined that the one fed the other. If anything, it was the army that gave the empire's government a reason to exist.

Like most groups that rely on warfare, the Assyrians had unusually martial element in their society. Any adult Assyrian male could be conscripted into military service, and all state offices were designated as military posts (van de Mieroop 2007, 230). Kings played an active role in the military and usually fought in campaigns; in fact, they did not stay behind the lines, and Sargon II was even killed in battle (van de Mieroop 2007, 230). In earlier periods, military campaigns were only fought during the summer after the harvest (when peasant men could be spared to fight and mountain passes

were clear), but by the later Neo-Assyrian period, the presence of a standing army meant that the Assyrians could go to war at any time (van de Mieroop 2007, 230). Since Assyria was a landlocked country it had to rely on mercenary sailors, primarily Phoenicians, who transported the army longer distances and fought sea battles (van de Mieroop 2007, 230).

The Assyrian army had a clear advantage over most of their enemies due to their advanced weapons, which were unmatched at the times in terms of technology. A number of pictorial reliefs from the ruins of the various Assyrian royal palaces relate details that are not mentioned in the annals, particularly the type of weapons the Assyrians used to lay siege to well defended cities. In one relief scene from the palace at Kalah, which is now housed in the British Museum (WA 115634+118903) and dated to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, the Assyrians are depicted besieging a walled city with an incredible weapon. The weapon is a wheeled siege machine that has giant spears projecting from its front, presumably to “lever away at the fortifications of the town” (Curtis and Reade 1995, 60). The machines were moved by men who were protected by a leather covering where water was probably stored inside to protect the machine from fire attacks (Curtis and Reade 1995, 60). On the other side of the relief Assyrian soldiers are depicted using ladders to successfully scale the wall of the city (Curtis and Reade 1995, 60). Numerous other examples exist in relief of clever siege engines that the Assyrians used to break down their enemies’ city walls, but what really made the Assyrian army feared was their treatment of enemy populations.

The Assyrian treatment of enemy populations approached a level of brutality that would have made Genghis Khan blush. Usually, the Assyrian army would approach an enemy territory with an overwhelming force, and if they did not surrender, the cities and villages that were deemed easy targets were attacked first. Once captured, the unfortunate inhabitants of a resistant region were summarily tortured, raped, beheaded, and flayed by the victorious Assyrians and then had their corpses publicly displayed (van de Mieroop 2007, 231). Some reliefs in the British Museum discussed above depict such an episode, with several of the inhabitants of the vanquished city impaled on pikes outside the city walls (Curtis and Reade 1995, 61).

After torturing and killing the inhabitants, the Assyrians would then raze the houses, salt the fields, and cut down the orchards. To add insult to injury, the survivors were then forced to pay a yearly tribute (van de Mieroop 2007, 231). A specific example of these tactics was when the king of Kadmuhu, which was just to the north of Assyria, was captured, flayed, had his skin displayed publicly on the walls of the city Arbela, and had his throne given to an Assyrian lackey (Kuhrt 2010, 2:480). If the survivors were lucky, they were allowed to remain in their homelands, but many were forced to move hundreds of miles away by the Assyrian kings.

A relief depicting the Assyrians flaying their enemies

The Assyrian practice of forced removal of entire populations is believed to have been first used during the reign Shalmaneser I (ca. 1274-1245 BCE) during the Middle Assyrian period (van de Mieroop 2007, 182). Later, Tukulti-Ninurta I (ca. 1244-1208) used this practice to send people from northern Syria to work on public projects in the Assyrian homeland (van de Mieroop 2007, 182), but it was during the Neo-Assyrian period that the practice was used to punish rebellious populations and as an implied threat against any who thought of opposing the Assyrians. It is estimated that during the last three centuries of the Assyrian Empire, approximately 4.5 million

people were deported from their homelands (van de Mieroop 2007, 233). The massive population removals are credited by some scholars as the reason for the extensive spread of the Aramaic language, which eventually replaced Akkadian as the *lingua franca* of the ancient Near East (van de Mieroop 2007, 233).

The Assyrians were known to brutalize their enemies, but they also were known to destroy their enemies' gods. One of the most calculated warfare methods that the Assyrians used against their enemies involved the taking of religious artifacts, known as "despoliation" of their enemies' cult statues. Most of the peoples of the ancient Near East kept statues of their deities in specific temples that they believed was essentially the avatar of the deity on earth. When a people lost a battle or war, it was usually blamed on divine abandonment, an idea demonstrated in the text that discussed Esarhaddon rebuilding Babylon after his successor, Sennacherib, destroyed the city. The destruction was not blamed on Sennacherib – the Assyrian king was never even mentioned – but instead on the Babylonians who disrespected Marduk, who in turn left them to be destroyed by the Assyrians. A similar situation can be seen in 2 Kings, where the Israelites have disobeyed Yahweh's law; the Biblical account says the deity used the Assyrians to invoke his wrath on his petulant people.

Cognizant of this philosophy, the Assyrians would add to their enemies defeat – and by extension of the prevailing theology, the abandonment by their gods – by stealing the divine cult statues of their enemies' most important gods, thereby ensuring that the god could not return (Kuhrt 2010, 2:513). This method was done by the Assyrians to their enemies over 30 times (Cogan 1974, 25), and the statues most revered by the vanquished were then repatriated to Ashur, Nineveh, or another important Assyrian city and held as trophies (Cogan 1974, 25). The despoliation of cult statues was extremely humiliating to a people who suffered such a fate since it symbolized that the vanquished had been forced into submission.

The submission of people the Assyrians defeated and/or colonized was formalized, ritualized, and documented in texts known as "loyalty oaths." As a superpower, the Assyrian king was in a position to dictate the terms of most agreements and receive unilateral concessions from the other parties.

However, there were cases when the Assyrian king was forced out of necessity to grant certain concessions to the other party (Parpolla 1988, xvi). These oaths were bound by blood, and to break one meant that the wrath of the Assyrian army would fall on the violator.

The loyalty oaths could be quite lengthy when they invoked the Assyrian pantheon, enumerated what were considered violations of the oath, and also gave a litany of punishments for transgressors. A treaty between Esarhaddon and the ruler of a land called Uarakazabanu is a detailed example. Part of the text reads, "(This is) the treaty which Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, has established with you before the great gods of heaven and earth, on behalf of the crown prince designate Ashurbanipal, the son of your lord Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, who has designated and appointed him for succession . . . If you do not serve the crown prince designate Ashurbanipal, whom Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, has presented to you and ordered you (to serve), on behalf of whom he has made this binding treaty with you, if you sin against him, lift your hands with evil intent against him, set afoot a rebellion, or wrong or evil plans against him, if you remove him from the kingship of Assyria, and help one of his brothers, younger or older, to take the throne of Assyria in his stead, and install another king, another lord over yourselves and swear to the oath of loyalty to another king or lord . . . Just as (this) oil enters your flesh, so may they make this oath enter your flesh, the flesh of your brothers, your sons and daughters. Just as one cuts off the hands and feet and blinds the eyes of those who blaspheme against the god or the lord, so may they bring about your end, may they make you sway like a marsh reed, may they tear you out like blood from the bandage of the enemy . . . May they [slaughter] you, your women, your brothers, your sons and daughters like kids. Just as the squeak produced by this door pivot, so may you, your women, your sons and daughters never rest nor sleep, not even your bones should stay together." (Prichard 1992, 535-40).

The grim and graphic language of the oaths was reinforced by the knowledge of what happened to previous peoples who the Assyrians slaughtered in the past. Any ruler who was under Assyrian hegemony only needed to read the oath he signed to realize what results he could expect if he decided to rebel. The oaths also therefore served as a psychological weapon against potential rebels.

Assyrian Kingship and Religion

The concept of kingship was at the center of Assyrian society, and like most ancient societies, it was inextricably enmeshed with religion. The Assyrian king was never deified like the pharaohs in Egypt, but absolute royal power became part of the development of kingship in Assyria and was linked to the acquisition of empire (Kuhrt 2010, 2:505).

Although not divine, the Assyrian king was chosen and allowed to rule by the divine, and as texts relate, he was also given the ends of the earth. Numerous Assyrian texts refer to the king as the "King of the Universe," as in this example from the reign of Esarhaddon: "Esarhaddon, king of the universe, king of Assyria, viceroy of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, the exalted prince, worshipper of Nabu and Marduk." (Luckenbill 1989, 242). A text from Ashurbanipal's palace at Kalah similarly reads, "(This is) the palace of Ashurbanipal, the high priest of Ashur, chosen by Enlil and Ninurta, the favorite of Anu and of Dagan (who is) destruction personified) among all the great gods – the legitimate king, the king of the world, the king of Assyria." (Pritchard 1992, 558). These and numerous other texts reveal that the Assyrian king knew no earthly boundaries to the land he ruled, which certainly had to concern Assyria's neighbors.

The texts also depict the Assyrian king as a pious follower of the Mesopotamian pantheon, a high priest of the gods, and ultimately bestowed with kingship by the gods. As a representative of the divine on earth, the Assyrian king worked to appease the pantheon, which included performing both proper rituals and leading his people in war. In addition to all the other reasons the Assyrians conducted military campaigns, the Assyrians also religiously ritualized war. The Assyrians would only go to war if all omens were favorable, and only after the king performed the proper purification rituals and prayers (Kuhrt 2010, 2:508). Oracles could be read from the livers of animals or be interpreted from dreams, and many of these oracles were recorded in texts, including a dream of a seer in which the goddess Ishtar commanded Ashurbanipal to attack Elam. The text reads, "The goddess Ishtar heard my anxious sighs and, 'Fear not!' she said, and filled my heart with confidence. 'Inasmuch as you have lifted your hands in prayer (and) your eyes are filled with tears, I have mercy.' During the night in which I

appeared before her, a seer reclined and saw a dream. When he awoke Ishtar showed him a night vision . . . ‘Eat food, drink wine, supply music, praise my divinity, while I go and do that work in order that you attain your heart’s desire. Your face (need) not become pale, nor your feet become exhausted, nor your strength come to naught in the onslaught of battle.’ In her loving bosom she embraced you and protected your whole figure. Before here a fire was then burning. To the conquest of [your] enemies [she will march forth] at (your) side. Against Teumman, king of Elam, with whom she is wroth, she has set her face.” (Pritchard 1992, 451). The oracle was read to the king, who was the subject of the dream, and the king would then act accordingly, usually in favor of war. After all, the king may have been a high-priest, but the most important aspect of Assyrian kingship was as a warrior (Kuhrt 2010, 2:510).

The religious rituals the king performed that were associated with warfare not only took place before a campaign but also upon a triumph. Offerings were made to Ashur (the god of the city of Ashur), Ishtar (the goddess of fertility and war), Shamash (the sun god), and Nabu (the god of wisdom and learning) by the victorious king, who also paraded prisoners-of-war in chains, the severed heads of enemies, and captured cult statues for the Assyrian people to see (Kuhrt 2010, 2:511).

The Assyrian king’s power was also demonstrated in art, particularly in pictorial reliefs similar to the ones that depicted siege tactics. Aside from depictions of warfare and sieges, another popular theme of Assyrian pictorial reliefs was royal hunts. In these scenes, the king was usually hunting a lion or several lions, which were a common species along the Euphrates River during the Neo-Assyrian period (Luckenbill 1989, 2:391). It is argued by modern scholars that these scenes served to “underline the heroic and protective character of the king” (Kuhrt 2010, 2:481), and some of the best preserved of these reliefs are dated to the reign of Ashurbanipal and come from his royal palace in Nineveh.

A series of these reliefs are now housed in the British Museum in London, and they depict a graphic realism combined with an idealized image of the potent king. One relief (WA 124871) depicts Ashurbanipal’s entourage bringing large mastiff dogs to the hunt (Curtis and Reade 1995, 85), while

another multi-register relief (WA 124886; WA 124887) shows the scene from start to finish. The top register reveals lions being released from a cage, and in the middle register the same lions, now uninterested, are being prodded by a horseman back into action. The king then demonstrates his prowess and potency when he grabs a lion by the tail with one arm as he is about to strike its head with a mace or some other type of weapon (Curtis and Reade 1995, 87). The bottom register of the relief reveals a religious nature to the hunt, as the king pours libations over the dead lions (Curtis and Reade 1995, 87).

In nearly all of the lion hunting scenes, the Assyrian king is depicted as heroic and the lions are merely a tool used to glorify the king's power, but one relief, known simply as the "Dying Lion," has been acclaimed as a "masterpiece" of Assyrian art (Curtis and Reade 1995, 88). The "Dying Lion" originally stood as part of the royal palace in Nineveh, but it is now housed in the British Museum in London (WA 1992-4-4.1), like most of the other notable Neo-Assyrian pictorial reliefs. In the scene, a male lion is squatting on his haunches with a mortal wound from an arrow that has pierced his back. The muscles on the lion's legs are accurately depicted, and blood is gushing from the its mouth. Some have argued that this is one of the rare pieces in Assyrian art that is sympathetic to lions, but since lions symbolized "everything hostile to urban" civilization to the Assyrians, it is more probable that those who viewed the relief were indifferent to the creature's plight (Curtis and Reade 1995, 87).

Assyrian reliefs depicting dying lions

The lion hunt texts depict the prowess of the Assyrian king, the king's connection to the pantheon, and the chaos that lions represent. One of the texts accompanying the reliefs reads, "I (am) Ashurbanipal, king of the universe, king of Assyria, for whom Assur, king of the gods (and) Ishtar, lady of battle, have decreed a life of heroism . . . Nergal, who goes before, caused me to undertake every (form) of hunting on the plain, and according to my

strength, I . . . I went forth. In an open space in the plain, fierce lions, dreadful creatures of the mountains, came out. They surrounded the chariot, my royal vehicle. At the command of Assur and Ishtar, the great gods, my lords, . . . my yoke . . . I shattered the might of those lions, . . . Urtaku, king of Elam, who fled and laid hold of my feet . . . a lion made for him and . . . he was scared and implored my majesty (for aid)." (Luckenbill 1989, 2:392)

The text is full of some obvious hyperbole that even contradicts the reliefs to a certain extent; after all, the reliefs show that at least some of the lions were captured and released and therefore not did not "come out of the mountains," as the text implies. However, the text accurately demonstrates the importance of these hunts from an ideological standpoint.

The Collapse of the Assyrian Empire

Every empire that has ever existed on the planet has eventually collapsed, and the Assyrian Empire was no exception. The Assyrian Empire witnessed its greatest expansion under Ashurbanipal, but within less than three decades of his death, the mighty empire itself was gone and Assyria's greatest cities had been destroyed. Even the culture itself was extinguished for the most part.

As with the collapse of any empire, internal factors played a role, but the emergence of new kingdoms and the reemergence of old ones also played critical roles. Ashurbanipal's most noted and impressive campaigns were against Egypt, but Egypt would also have a role in Assyria's undoing. The Nile Valley sat undisturbed for centuries at a time by outside invaders, and even when outsiders did manage to conquer part or even all of Egypt – such as the Hyksos in the 17th century BC, the Libyans at the beginning of the second millennium BC, and the Nubians in the late 8th and early 7th centuries BCE – their rule and influence was usually ephemeral. Assyrian rule in Egypt did not last long either, but it proved to be the high water mark of the Assyrian Empire. By the time of Ashurbanipal's death in 627 BCE, the Egyptians, under the resurgent Twenty Sixth Dynasty, had managed to take Assyrian Levantine possessions (van de Mieroop 2007, 267).

Despite those conquests, the Egyptian Twenty Sixth Dynasty, which was essentially put into power by Ashurbanipal, maintained cordial relations with

the Assyrians and were never a threat to Ashur. Instead, the Assyrians' true threat came from new dynasties to the south and east. To the south of Assyria, in Babylon, a new dynasty of ethnic Chaldeans came to power under the rule of Nabopolassar in 626 BCE (van de Mieroop 2007, 267). By 616, Nabopolassar and the Neo-Babylonians (as his dynasty is often referred to by modern scholars) began to raid Assyrian territory and were aided by the Medes, an ethnic group from Iran (van de Mieroop 2007, 267).

Unlike the collapse of many empires where there are no written texts that describe the events, the fall of Assyria was documented in Neo-Babylonian historical annals. The events are meticulously depicted taking place in the 10th-17th years of the reign of Nabopolassar, and a text describes an anti-Assyrian coalition that ultimately destroyed Nineveh and Ashur. The text reads, "Twelfth year: When, in the month Abu, the Medians . . . against Nineveh . . . they rushed and seized the town of Tarbisu, a town belonging to the province of Nineveh . . . they went downstream on the embankment of the Tigris and pitched (camp) against Ashur. They made an attack against the town and [took the town], [the wall of] the town was torn down, a terrible defeat/massacre they inflicted upon the entire population. They took booty (and) carried pri[soners away]. The king of Akkad and his army who went to the aid of the Medians did not come in time for the battle." (Pritchard 1992, 304). Thus, ironically but fittingly, the Assyrians were brutalized in the same ways they had employed by many of the same people that they had previously massacred and enslaved.

The passage of time would commit the final act of cruelty on the once great empire. Less than 200 years after the collapse of the Assyrian Empire, the Greek general, mercenary, and military historian Xenophon led an expedition of 10,000 Greek soldiers into the Achaemenid Empire to support a rival claimant to the throne. When Xenophon's claimant was killed in battle, he and his men were forced to march through the empire back to Greece. On the journey back to Greece, the 10,000 Greeks fought many battles against natives and encountered many awe-inspiring sights, but one of the more inspiring sights that Xenophon wrote about in *Anabasis* was the ruins of the Assyrian city of Kalhu. Xenophon wrote, "After suffering this defeat the enemy retired, and the Greeks marched on safely for the rest of the day and reached the river Tigris. There was a large deserted city there called Larissa,

which in the old days used to be inhabited by the Medes. It had walls twenty-five feet broad and a hundred feet high, with a perimeter of six miles. It was built of bricks made of clay, with a stone base of twenty feet underneath. At the time when the Persians seized the empire from the Medes, the King of the Persians laid siege to this city but was quite unable to take it. A cloud, however, covered up the sun and hid it from sight until the inhabitants deserted the place, and so the city was taken. Near the city there was a pyramid of stone, a hundred feet broad, and two hundred feet high. Many of the natives from the neighboring villages had run away and taken refuge on it."

Xenophon's description of the ruins of Kalah is important for a few reasons. First, the report is extremely anachronistic since he credits the Medes as the builders of the city when in fact they were among the coalition who destroyed it. Second, the ruins of the "pyramid of stone" he describes is almost certainly the ziggurat of Kalah discussed above, which makes this account the first post-Assyrian text to mention the monument.

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of Xenophon's account is that the Assyrians, as great as they were in their own time, had been completely forgotten in a matter of just two centuries. It would be many centuries more before historians fully understood the civilization that had once flourished there.

Bibliography

Cochavi-Rainey, Zipora, trans and ed. 1999. *Royal Gifts in the Late Bronze Age Fourteenth to Thirteenth Centuries B.C.E.: Selected Texts Recording Gifts to Royal Personages*. Jerusalem: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press.

Cogan, Morton. 1974. *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah, and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press.

Curtis, J.E. and J.E. Reade, eds. 1995. *Art and Empire: Treasures from Assyria in the British Museum*. London: British Museum Press.

Drews, Robert. 1993. *The End of the Bronze Age: Changes in Warfare and*

the Catastrophe ca. 1200 B.C. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Frankfort, Henri. 1996. *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

Grayson, A. Kirk, ed. 2000. *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns.

Haywood, John. 2005. *The Penguin Historical Atlas of Ancient Civilizations*. London: Penguin Books.

Kitchen, Kenneth A. 2003. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans.

Kuhrt, Amélie. 2010. *The Ancient Near East: c. 3000-330 BC*. 2 vols. London: Routledge.

Luckenbill, Daniel David, ed. and trans. 1989. *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*. 2 vols. London: Histories and Mysteries of Man.

Macadam, M. F. 1949. *The Temples of Kawa*. 2 Vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mieroop, Marc van de. 2007. *A History of the Ancient Near East: ca. 3000-323 BC*. 2nd ed. London: Blackwell.

Parpolla, Simo, and Kazuko Watanabe trans., and eds. 1988. *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty*

Oaths. Vol. 2 of *State Archives of Assyria*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.

Pritchard, James B, ed. 1992. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. 3rd ed. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Sandars, N.K. 1987. *The Sea Peoples: Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean, 1250-1150 BC.* London: Thames and Hudson.

Snell, Daniel C. 2011. *Religions of the Ancient Near East.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Soden, Wolfram von. 1994. *The Ancient Orient: An Introduction to the Study of the Ancient Near East.* Translated by Donald G. Schley. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans.

Spalinger, Anthony. 1973. "The Year 712 B.C. and its Implications for Egyptian History." *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 10: 95-101.

———. 1974a. "Esarhaddon and Egypt; An Analysis of the First Invasion of Egypt." *Orientalia* 43: 295-326.

———. 1974b. "Ashurbanipal and Egypt: A Source Study." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94: 316-328.

Speiser, E.A. 1983. "Ancient Mesopotamia." In *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Robert C. Denton, 35-76. New Haven, Connecticut: American Oriental Society.

Verbrugge, Gerald P, and John M. Wickersham, eds. 2001. *Berossos and Manetho, Introduced and Translated: Native Traditions in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Xenophon. 1972. *The Persian Expedition*. Translated by Rex Warner. London: Penguin Books.